Red Poppies

by Emeline Morrison

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L. E. S.

RED POPPIES

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A Novel

BY

EMMELINE MORRISON

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TO NELL

Remembering 1917 on the East Coast

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Part One

PRE-WAR

RED POPPIES

CHAPTER ONE

THE exhibition dance, an eighteenth-century minuet done in the costume of the period, had finished; and now the orchestra was playing a waltz by Strauss, and a few couples were dancing rather self-consciously in the large, beautifully-lighted room—with its floor like polished copper and its Renaissance decorations.

There were flowers—tulips, lilac from the south of France, and mimosa—and the air was warm and scented, filled with music, and tinkle of glasses and coffee-cups, and the rustle of silk gowns.

It was quite a novel idea, people said, to have a ball-room lounge adjoining the dining-room, so that dinner or supper over, one could walk in, be seated at one of the many little glass-topped tables, and dance in between the coffee and refreshment. A pleasant way of passing the evening, and nicer than lingering over the table in the dining-room. Dancing in public was a novelty in London then, outside public balls for charity, or subscription dances. There were few night clubs and no dance clubs, and the Karina Hotel looked like making a huge success of it.

The music was good, and they provided not only a troupe of young dancers for exhibition dances, but also to give lessons and dance with the guests.

And all of it a really first-class, highly-reputable enter-

tainment at a new, modern, and expensive hotel near Hyde Park Corner, to which men might take their wives and daughters (if they wished) without fear.

Dennis Armitage would not have been there if it had been otherwise, for though he liked to say, and pretend, that he lived a gay life in Town, in reality he did nothing of the sort, and was very particular where he went and with whom, and about his name and reputation. He told himself that he had to be for his mother's sake—which was totally untrue and unnecessary, for Mrs. Armitage would have been no better pleased to know that her son was at the "Karina after-dinner dances" than if he had been at the most notorious night club in London, these places being all the same, in her opinion.

Fortunately, however, she knew nothing of how he spent his time, and pictured him where perhaps he ought to have been—in his soberly furnished bachelor flat studying law, and retiring to a virtuous couch at ten o'clock.

That would have been reckoning without Jack Eden, for it was he who led Dennis astray, having a habit of telephoning the younger man, or rushing round to his flat whenever possible, and suggesting they should "make a night of it."

Sometimes they went to the theater or a music-hall—the "Empire" or "Alhambra." Sometimes to a dance, either private or subscription; and since the Karina Hotel had opened their ballroom in December, and commenced these evening dances and "shows," they had frequented this.

Dennis suspected "old Jack" of a penchant for a very pretty French dancer, who would, however, have none of him; and he had smiled upon this in a superior manner as one above such follies.

That was until he saw Alixe Gerard dancing to the latest American craze in ragtime. From that hour he had not only encouraged Jack Eden to come here, but had worried him unceasingly to obtain him an introduc-

tion to the Viennese dancer with the English name and, what he thought, the most lovely eyes in the world.

Tonight, at last, his desire had been achieved, and he had met and spoken to her. He had asked her to dance, and she had said: "Certainly."

All his life he remembered that the orchestra played the "Pink Lady" waltz the first time he danced with Alixe Gerard, and the night he lost his heart to her.

And now they sat at a little table, and drank coffee and liqueurs, while she smoked a Russian cigarette in an amber holder.

Jack Eden had ordered the coffee and liqueur while they were dancing, and she had been difficult to persuade to drink it, for she said she took nothing but coffee.

"But I do like Dr. Eden," she remarked, when the latter had left them to dance again. "He is always so kind, so lively, and full of fun. Are you a doctor, too?"

Dennis said that he was not. He was the junior partner in an old, highly respected firm of lawyers, with big old offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields, of which firm Jack Eden's father was the senior partner since the death of Richard Armitage some years ago.

"A lawyer!" repeated the pretty dancer. "But how dull! I would rather be a doctor than a lawyer wrapped up in dusty, musty law books and law courts. No—I shouldn't like that."

"Neither do I," admitted young Armitage, "but I'm afraid I don't spend much time at the office. In fact, I only put in an appearance for two or three hours a day. I wanted to go into the Army, but—well, I couldn't. And I would not do anything else, so I joined my father's firm."

"The Army?" A pair of dark smoke-gray eyes looked at the young man, but they were so deeply fringed with dark lashes that he could not read their expression, even if he had tried to do so. "Why couldn't you go into the Army? If I had been a man, I should have been

there. Were you not strong enough—or clever? Of course, I forget—in England you do have to pass examinations to enter the Army as an officer. Is it not so?"

"It is—and I never tried, but I dare say I could have got a commission if I had. Only my mother would not hear of it—I am an only son, and she is a widow."

"Oh, that is it! But still, there is no war, is there? You would not be likely to be killed; and surely it is the best of all professions for a young man."

"So I thought—and think; but, you see, I should probably have been sent abroad, perhaps to India or Egypt, and she simply wouldn't hear of it. She wanted me to go in for the Church—take Holy Orders—be a clergyman, you know. But I didn't like the idea."

"What—to be a parson?" This invoked a smile which crinkled up the charming face and ended in a little gleeful laugh. "Oh, why not? You'd make a perfectly sweet curate for the ladies of a country parish to ask to tea."

Dennis Armitage felt the color mount to his face as if he were a schoolboy. He was sure that he was considerably older than this girl dancer, whose laughing eyes and lilting voice had already woven a spell round what he believed to be an impregnable heart; but she made him feel horribly young and "out of it."

"I have not, and never had, the slightest desire to be what you call a 'sweet curate'," he retorted offendedly. "That is just why I am a solicitor; because if I am in my father's firm, and working at anything, I can't be expected, even by my mother, to take up another profession. Also, it keeps me in London."

"London is a naughty city for boys," remarked the dancer teasingly. "Where do you live?"

He told her he had a bachelor flat off St. James's Street, adding: "I like to live my own life; and in the country I should have to stay with my mother and sisters."

Just then, Jack Eden came back to them, accompanied by another man, and he stopped to speak to Dennis and

his companion, silently admiring her as he always did. Silently, because even at the theater where at present, in addition to the "Karina," she was dancing a "turn"; men did not openly admire, nor were they familiar with, Miss Gerard.

There was at all times a mystery about her—an aloof manner which kept them in their place. She was charming to those who were respectful to her; she laughed, teased, and danced with a favored few, but at the least hint of any familiarity she froze into indifference.

Jack Eden had felt it more than once, and therefore turned his roving eye and gay smile elsewhere, just as he warned young Armitage that he would also, when he discovered for himself that the lady was not in the least interested in him.

But things had turned out slightly different to his expectation. The suggested introduction had met with her approval. She had said: "Oh, yes—I know. The nice-looking boy who comes with you and stares at me. Yes, yes—I will dance with him if he wants me to."

And she had danced with him, to Jack Eden's surprise, for it was more than he had ever won of her favor; and now they were still sitting together talking when he came back after another dance.

"No chance for me, Miss Gerard?" he asked. "Won't you give me the next dance, and then you can look on, Dennis."

"I am sorry," she answered quickly—but not at all as if she were really so. "In a few minutes I must go and dress for my next exhibition dance, and after that I shall have to leave, as I have to be at the Argosy Theatre at ten o'clock. Another night, Dr. Eden—yes?"

"That's what you always say!" He laughed, and passed on; but Dennis did not move.

"It was jolly nice of you to dance with me," he said. "Because I'm not much good at it. Can I drive you to the Argosy Theatre?—I've got my car here."

"No, thank you very much." She looked at him rather hard as she spoke, and he wondered if he had been too presumptuous in offering even that. He longed to go a little further, and say: "May I drive you home?" But that, of course, would offend her.

Yet, because she asked suddenly: "Of what are you thinking—tell me?" he told her, and was immensely relieved to hear her laugh.

Jack Eden had been so positive that she would "turn him down" at the first meeting, and doubtful whether she would even dance with him; but for once he was wrong, and Dennis felt he might as well press his advantage.

"Quite a forward little boy," she answered lightly, after a minute. "You make my acquaintance but half an hour ago, and you ask, 'May I drive you home?' As you would say over here, 'Quick work that!' Tomorrow, I suppose, it would be, 'May I call upon you?' "

"Exactly—I did think of saying that also tonight."

He looked at her perfectly frankly. "But I don't mean to offend. You say we have only met tonight, but I have been waiting for the opportunity for weeks. I should so much like to—to know and be friends with you."

"Really? Quite a lot of men have said that to me, but it is not always what they mean——" She paused.

"It is what I mean," returned Dennis Armitage; and his clear eyes met hers frankly.

"That, then, will remain to be seen," answered the dancer softly, "but not this evening. And now I must go and change my dress."

"Why not this evening? My car is here."

This time she laughed. "Another day," she said, and moved quickly away among the tables, to be lost in the crowd.

. . . . .

"Quite pretty!" Jack Eden pronounced her. "I believe she is an Austrian and comes from Vienna."

"She speaks very good English, then, though there is, of course, a little accent. But it's rather pretty."

Dennis tried to describe her to himself; but what man can describe a pretty woman except after long acquaintance?

She was not exactly tall, but equally she was not small, not in the least insignificant. Her hair was golden-brown, and inclined to curl; and her eyes—now, what color were her eyes? He recollected she had a short straight nose, and a very sweet mouth, which even on such an early acquaintance he would have given a fortune to kiss—but her eyes puzzled him. They seemed to magnetize him, searching his mind all the while she smiled; and they were full of shadows and secrets.

"Come, come!" exclaimed Jack Eden, slapping him on the back with more affection than vigor. "You mustn't start that, or I shall get into trouble with your mother. The charming Miss Gerard, whose real name is probably 'Smith' or 'Schneider,' is pretty, and novel to you because she is Viennese, but you mustn't take 'em seriously. Have you seen her partner?"

"Of course—ugly brute!"

Jack Eden laughed delightedly. "True—he's ugly, but he can dance. She can dance, too, but she's pretty—that's the attraction. And a bit of a mystery, I imagine."

"A charming mystery, then," thought Dennis, wondering whether it was worth while waiting to see if she would come back after her dance.

He did wait, but she disappeared immediately it was over.

. . . . .

There was an interlude of a week-end spent in the country then; but at the beginning of the week Dennis

was back at the Karina Hotel for dinner, and afterwards at his usual table waiting for his new divinity to appear.

When he did see her, however, she was not alone, but with a middle-aged foreigner. ("Beastly German," Dennis called him to himself, for they were conversing like old friends in that language.)

Then he remembered that she was not English; and with all the insular prejudice of the untraveled, he felt that he hated all foreigners, went home to his flat in quite a sulky temper, and wished he had never gone near the "Karina."

For a week he avoided it, and then the law of attraction proved too strong and, choosing a night when Jack Eden could not accompany him, Dennis slipped into his usual seat just as "Fräulein Alixe Gerard" was giving an exhibition of an Apache dance—rather a popular show in 1914.

Amid the applause Dennis reached her side and murmured "Good evening" in her ear.

"Ah—the lawyer man!" said the dancer. "I thought you had given us up and gone away—I did not see you for ten days or more. What has been happening to you?"

"I did come one evening, but I could not get near you," answered the young man. "You had a friend with you, and you seemed very much engaged. May I have the pleasure of a dance tonight?"

"When I have changed my dress. Oh, yes. Do you dance the Tango? Yes?"

Dennis looked rather alarmed. "I know the steps, but I should not like to say I dance it."

"You dance with me? My partner has not come yet, and I have a Tango next. If you know the steps, I will do the rest, and you will soon fall in with me. I must get my Spanish shawl and comb, and I will come back to you here."

It was very alarming to be suddenly invited to do the Tango—an entirely new dance, then—with a profes-

sional; but it was too good an opportunity to be missed, and Dennis resolved to go through with it and make a success of it, or perish in the attempt.

And so he danced, conscious a little of the staring crowd, for they had the floor to themselves, but more conscious of the slight figure he held to him in the fascinating Spanish dance, of her sweetness, and the perfume of lavender which clung to her and was more reminiscent of an old English garden than a London restaurant ballroom. Conscious, too, of the music—a new time and tune to England. Somebody said afterwards that it was called "In Your Arms," a quite appropriate name if it had mattered. But for the space of a few minutes nothing did matter but he and she.

It was over all too quickly, and there was more applause.

"Thank you—thank you," she said to Dennis. "You dance it quite well for a beginner—you did not make one mistake. Come—let us sit down, and we will have some coffee and a little cigarette."

"It was gorgeous," answered the young man extravagantly. "I wish we could have another later on."

"A waltz, perhaps." She seated herself at the little table. "No—only coffee, please. I must dance again, and perhaps if I were to drink champagne, my legs they would not want to dance; because, you see, I do not ever drink wine, except perhaps a little claret or hock with my dinner. What was the waltz you said you liked the other night?"

" 'The Pink Lady.' It would be a good name for you" —looking at her with eyes full of honest admiration—"I think that pink dress of yours is too beautiful—it looks like the inside of a shell, pink and mother-o'-pearl. I'm glad I didn't let you down over that Tango, but I was horribly afraid I should. Will you—will you try me again some time?"

"Yes." She looked at him with a friendly smile. "Please light my cigarette—thank you. Yes, if you come

one afternoon—Monday or Friday—to the 'Karina,' I will give you a lesson in the Tango. I dance here from four to six twice a week, and give lessons and exhibition dances. Would you like to do that, Mr. Lawyer?"

"Very much, and I will. Only—don't please call me 'Mr. Lawyer.' My name is Armitage."

"I know. Dr. Eden calls you 'Dennis.' A pretty name—it has the old-fashioned sound of old days and knights. You would make a good knight in armor on a white horse——"

"You said a pretty curate—I haven't forgotten."

They both laughed at nothing.

"No, a knight—a perfect knight," she repeated. "The flower of chivalry and romance. Shall I expect you one afternoon, then?"

"You bet your life I shall come! But look here—may I drive you home tonight? I won't ask to come in, or anything like that; but I've got my car here, and why not? I shall not stay a second after you have left."

"No, no—not at night." She shook her head. "Perhaps if you come in the afternoon you may, and we will give you tea. For, of course, I do not live alone."

"You haven't got a husband tucked away, have you?" asked Dennis in genuine consternation.

She laughed outright. "No—I am not married. I live with a woman friend—she is German. I——" She looked at him with her peculiar smoke-gray eyes set in a deep fringe of golden-brown lashes. "I wonder you like to come to the 'Karina' so much. There are always so many foreigners here—Greeks, Russians, Germans—and most Englishmen do not like foreigners. Do you?"

"No, I don't—I hate them," began Dennis, and then he remembered that she was one herself.

He apologized at once, but she shook her head and only smiled.

"But I am not," she declared quietly. "My father was British, and so I must also be British, must not I?

I have lived nearly all my life in Austria and Germany, but I was born in London."

"Really?" Dennis looked incredulous. "Somebody said that you came from Vienna!"

"I lived in Vienna for some time, and also in Berlin. But London is my native city."

"And when did you come back?"

"Last summer—I came over in July. I went first to an hotel as professional dancer—that was in Southsea—and I came to London in October, and got my engagement here before Christmas. Fortunate, was I not?"

"I don't know. You dance beautifully, and I suppose you like it or you would not do it; but I——" He broke off because it sounded stupid and pedantic to say he wouldn't like to see his sisters doing the same, for there was no shade of immodesty about either her dress or her dancing.

"Tell me of yourself," she questioned, leaning her beautiful creamy arms on the table and smiling at him over it. "Where do you live? Have you sisters? But no—you said you were an only child."

"Son. I have two sisters, one older and one younger than myself, and they live up the Thames at a place called Longmead."

"Ah, yes—your lovely Thames! I must go and see it when the summer comes. I have heard it is beautiful, but I have never been there."

"Never been up the Thames!" Dennis stared at her in astonishment. "And you've been in England seven months!"

"Ah, but I am busy—I have not much time; and then, too, our weather!"

"Our weather is all right—and you are not busy on Sundays I am sure, for this place is only open for meals, and there is no dancing, as I know. What about——" He hesitated. "I suppose you wouldn't let me take you? I've rather a nice car, and I'd love to."

Alixe Gerard looked at him gravely and very hard for some seconds before she answered.

"When, or if I know you better—perhaps. Just now, as I continue to tell you, I do not know you at all. Ah, yes—you say that can be remedied, but it takes time. And—Oh, please, you must excuse me, but I see my partner, and I must explain to him about our next dance. Shall I really see you one afternoon?"

"You most certainly will," replied Dennis vigorously. "You have promised to give me a lesson in the Tango and also to invite me to tea, don't forget! I'll be here."

CHAPTER TWO

LONGMEAD HOUSE was generally known in the neighborhood as "The Hall," because it was the most imposing residence for miles around.

It had smooth lawns sloping down to the River Thames, not very far from Reading; it was surrounded on three sides by trees, and so suitably screened from the main road which ran past the gates. It had a boat-house with the latest model of motor-boat as well as a punt and skiff; tennis courts; conservatories; and within, although it was old-fashionedly furnished, it was comfortable, and always well staffed.

Dennis Armitage ought to have been happy and content. He had everything he could want or think of to make him so—his own flat or chambers in London, and his own Rolls-Royce car which he kept in Town. And whenever he wanted, or fancied that he wanted, anything he bought it; generally to find afterwards that he did not care about it at all. But his father and grandfather had made and left such a lot of money, that he might, so he argued, just as well spend it. And yet Dennis was not really happy.

He did not know what either real happiness or unhappiness meant; he had always had sufficient money and good health, with enough work to keep his days reasonably employed. His one and only disappointment had been the Army, just as his one irritation was his mother. It was unconfessed, this last, because by the strict laws of the Bible and conventional family life, obedience, duty, and all that, a man might not be irritated by, or complain about, his mother.

Mrs. Armitage was as august as her name "Augusta"

signified. She was the daughter of a North Country bishop and the sister of a clergyman, and she had always considered that it was a condescension on her part when she married Richard Armitage, whose father had made his money in steel. Of course, Richard had nothing to do with this firm except receive the money which his father had left—he was a partner in a highly respectable firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London—Eden & Armitage—where it really did not matter whether they made money or not because there was already so much. For apart from the rich harvest reaped from old trust and family business, the bulk of Eden & Armitage's clientele, Richard had been wise in his early days in London—wise and far-seeing. He had bought property in London and, as the leases fell in, this grew increasingly valuable until today, when Dennis, his only son, was spending the accrued wealth and thinking how easily it had been come by.

Actually Dennis hated business, and although, since his father's death, he was nominally a partner in the firm, he took little part in it. He liked freedom and what he called "the world," and he only kept it up and put in a dutiful appearance at the office, because it kept his mother quiet, and enabled him to have the excuse for a flat in Town. Mrs. Armitage pictured Dennis in his father's chair in his private office studying law and interviewing important and wealthy clients; but usually when these visions took place Dennis was lunching at a West End restaurant, dancing, motoring out of Town, and generally trying to enjoy himself.

Dutifully he went down to Longmead every week-end, and was bored stiff by the dull and proper household, and the lack of entertainment.

There was not even anything for him to do, for his mother gave instructions both within and without. A competent housekeeper and an equally competent head gardener, both of whom had been in the Armitage employ for nearly twenty years, attended to everything. And al-

though it belonged to Dennis he had never had any part in it, nor would have while his mother lived, and therefore he never realized his responsibilities.

It was a bone of contention, however, that he refused to live there altogether, for Mrs. Armitage considered that respectable young men ought to stay at home, and that a West End flat was "fast."

"It is not as if Longmead is far from London," she would say again and again. "It is just forty minutes by train, and the car can take you to the station and bring you back in the evening—when it is necessary for you to go."

"Exactly," thought the son. "And when it is not necessary for me to go I am to stay here at home and play marbles like a good boy in the garden! No, not this time!"

But he did not say it aloud, because it was never worth while arguing with "the Mater"; and anyway, he wasn't going to listen to her and give up his nice little bachelor flat—not he! And not even though he did get into trouble if he chanced to miss a Sunday at home.

London had too many attractions for him, known and unknown to his mother. There were the theaters and concerts, and he had a real love of music. There was the Piccadilly Club, and the men he met there—jolly cheery restaurants at which to feed, nice people and pretty girls to meet and be amused by.

And there was Jack Eden, his one great friend—the resident medical officer of King's Hospital.

Now Jack Eden did not come to Longmead House, and could not because Mrs. Armitage did not like nor approve of him. She called him "fast" and "vulgar" (even though he was the son of her late husband's partner), and she had also discovered recently to her horror that on the occasion of his last visit for the week-end, which had chanced to be in the summer holidays, Dr. Eden had admired and followed her young daughter Jean, who was then only seventeen and at school.

So Jack Eden came no more, and to him she put down most of Dennis's delinquencies.

Dennis too, had a habit of using the hospital and the "R.M.O." as an excuse for not coming home on Saturdays. A concert—a dance or entertainment there, which kept him until too late. And his mother strongly disapproved of King's Hospital for her son. She considered that the nurses were flighty and fast, if not worse still. Dennis called them "sports," which for the most part they were; and he flirted with them and enjoyed himself in the most harmless way—harmless, not because he shared or inherited his mother's moral scruples, but because he was not, and never yet had been, sufficiently intrigued with any woman to go further.

If he had tasted life he had done so for experience's sake, and not to be left behind; but Dennis Armitage was not a lady's man, and his pleasure lay quite as much, if not more, in the company of his own sex, as the opposite.

Girls were all right for a dance, or a "lark," but really, he often thought he had sufficient of women at home with his austere mother and her iron rule, and his two young sisters. He preferred men and their conversation.

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He drove his own Rolls-Royce down to Longmead the day after his second meeting with Alixe Gerard, and the arrangement to see her at the "Karina" *thé dansant*. It was raining much to his annoyance, for that meant he could not spend the afternoon on the golf-course as he had planned; and there would be no chance on Sunday, for his mother would not hear of games on the Sabbath day.

She insisted that they went to church; and Sunday at Longmead was, in her son's opinion, a thoroughly rotten day which never varied; for they had neither company nor entertainment.

Mrs. Armitage was not popular among the younger set

of the county people, for she considered herself their superior, looked down upon all her neighbors, and eyed with stern disapproval and suspicion every young man or woman who came to the house and looked twice at her son or her daughters; which resulted in their being left more or less alone, especially at the week-ends when every other house in the neighborhood was entertaining.

. . . . .

"Why didn't you bring Dr. Eden down?" asked Jean, the younger daughter, on Sunday morning after breakfast. "Sundays are so dull, and he is always funny."

"The Mater doesn't like him, nor approve of your doing so. Besides, Jack couldn't have come today—he's on duty; and Sunday is no duller than any other day in this God-forsaken place."

"Yes it is—we can't play tennis on Sundays, nor can you play golf. Mother doesn't even like us to take the car out unless it is necessary—she doesn't like us to do anything but go to church and sing hymns!"

Well Dennis knew it! He ticked the time-table off on his fingers: "Breakfast 9:30, church 11 o'clock, lunch 1:30 (and not even a cocktail!), sleep until tea, church at 6:30, dinner at 8 o'clock; and spare time filled in with Sunday papers smuggled in by the gardener's boy through the window; cigarettes, and, when procurable, a lurid novel banned by the libraries!"

"Oh, Dennis! If mother could hear you, how cross she'd be!" And Jean laughed because it was so true, and exactly what Dennis (and she, when possible) did.

"I often think the Mater ought to provide one with cigarettes. I smoke so many on Sundays," he added idly. "Also pay my library subscription. I've brought a really hectic novel down this week-end, Jean, but you're not old enough to read it! Would you like it, Phyllis?"

Phyllis declined. She preferred old-fashioned books, and was a quiet, well-read, studious girl of twenty-eight.

She did not tell tales of Dennis and Jean, although she sometimes rebuked them; she simply was not interested, and went her own way among her books and friends.

But Jean at eighteen was growing more like her brother every day, and both, as Phyllis could see, were beginning to kick over the traces.

"Let me have it, Dennis darling," begged Jean. "I'd love it, and some cigarettes, too—I've not had one for an age!"

They were waiting in the breakfast-room to accompany their mother to church; while outside the carriage and pair stood in readiness; for although Mrs. Armitage kept a car for shopping and the station, she always drove in her carriage to church, or when she went visiting; considering it more befitting the dignity of a bishop's daughter, and the Lady of the Manor—which was how she regarded herself.

Phyllis was dressed in brown, with a brown beaver hat and a sable stole; while Jean wore cream, with a large dark hat and ermine furs. She was very fair was Jean, and very pretty; but as yet she lacked expression, for she knew nothing of life beyond Longmead House, and her mother's rule and school; while Phyllis, always preoccupied and full of herself and her books, was like her mother, and only just saved from being plain.

Dennis was inclined to be dark, and like his father and all the Armitages. He was tall and slim, with quite cameo-cut features, blue eyes, and a charming smile which gave him at all times a frank and pleasant look. He was considered good-looking, but his face, too, lacked expression, for as yet life had not given him much to think about.

Mrs. Armitage swept into the room now. She too was tall, large and imposing. Her hair had been fair, but now at sixty it was nearly white; although her eyes were keen as when she was young, and her figure well preserved.

"Pray come along at once," she commanded. "We shall scarcely be there before the service commences. Phyllis—fasten your gloves before you leave the room; and Dennis,

may I remind you that it is Charity Sunday, and the Rector expects a sovereign from you in the offertory plate as an example to the parishioners."

"Poor beggars—perhaps they can't afford to follow our example," said Dennis. "And the old chap isn't exactly generous himself, if I remember rightly."

"My dear Dennis, you forget that Mr. Robinson has seven children to bring up and educate. How can he be generous?"

"Well, presumably they are his children." Dennis permitted himself to smile. "And he had the pleasure of getting them. At least, as he is a clergyman, we hope so. But parsons ought not to have so many children—it isn't decent."

"Dennis!" (His mother's expression was so horrified that Jean broke into an irrepressible giggle.) "Do you forget that your sisters are present? Come along at once, please, and end this unseemly conversation."

She swept out of the room again, very erect and dignified in her black silk gown and fur coat, and they followed her without a word. On the short drive to the church not one of them spoke; and they filed solemnly in, and up the aisle to the special Longmead House pew.

Phyllis sat at the top of it, then Jean, Dennis at the entrance, and their mother between them. She had sat thus since they were children and had whispered to each other during the Rector's long dull sermons.

They were grown up now, and did not try, nor wish to talk; but the same rector still preached the same long dull sermons, the choir still sang: "A few more years shall roll," and everything at Longmead was just the same.

It was, as his mother had reminded him, Charity Sunday, which came round every month, when the offertory was for the sick and poor fund.

"Charity!" thought Dennis, bored as he listened. "What was charity? Giving away something you did not want generally, or something you never missed."

They were considered a charitable family in the neigh-

borhood—one of the leading lights in benevolence. Mrs. Armitage gave a sovereign each first Sunday of the month for the sick and poor—many other sovereigns, too—and she regularly knitted mufflers, mittens, and stockings for the infirm of the parish. There was never a sale of work but Mrs. Armitage of Longmead House took a stall—never a charity to which she did not subscribe.

"It was easy to be charitable when one was rich," thought her son, looking at his mother's sable coat, worth probably a sum which would keep one of the poor of the parish in comfort for the remainder of his or her life—at his sister's expensive furs, and the ostrich plume in her hat.

Oh, yes—they were charitable, because it cost them nothing; and thinking of charity and being poor, he came to thinking as he so often did, of Alixe Gerard, the Viennese dancer at the Karina Hotel.

Was she poor? He had always thought these young and little-known artists were badly off—he had seen them paid for, heard them complain that they "could not live on their screw," and knew for a fact that they accepted presents of all descriptions.

But Miss Gerard had insisted upon paying for her coffee the other night, and her clothes were expensive—he was sure the pearls round her throat were real. One night, too, when he had been about to drive away in his car, she had come out with a friend from the restaurant, and he had seen her, by the street lamp's glare, empty her purse into a poor street singer's tin.

Was that charity—or was she no poorer than they?

. . . . .

The sermon continued at great length, but now he had begun to think about Alixe, Dennis ceased to listen. He was tired of church and sermons, sick of being rich, idle, and "smug," as he had heard his family called—of being land-owners, gentry, and all that. Of Longmead House

with its old and trusted staff of servants, indoors and out; its cold comfort, and his mother's iron rule and austere manner.

He wished something would happen that would change it all.

"True religion and undefiled is this," announced the red-whiskered Rector, "to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

They certainly followed that part of the commandment, he thought with a yawn. One could not imagine a member of the Armitage family going wrong—turning aside from the narrow path of virtue. They seemed to be born good.

"Dennis!" came his mother's voice.

With horror, young Armitage awoke to the realization that the Rector had come to the end of his discourse, and the whole congregation with the exception of himself was standing, while he lounged in the cushioned corner of his pew.

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed audibly; while Jean suppressed a giggle, and Mrs. Armitage stood stiff and stern between them.

They sang the last hymn, and he saw the glitter of his and his mother's sovereigns as they passed into the plate, and the benign smile of the sidesman as he observed the coins. Foolishly, Dennis wondered if the old man would still smile if it were a trouser button he had put in instead, as once in his schoolboy days he had done (and suffered for it afterwards at his mother's hands!)

"Give up all that thou hast," they were told. So they gave a sovereign, and then went home and ate a luncheon which cost probably twice that amount.

Truly, life was a queer affair of grim humor, and only a few people seemed to see it. He was sure his family never did, and never had.

CHAPTER THREE

THE afternoon at the "Karina" was quite a success, for although Dennis preferred dancing at night, Miss Gerard, or "Fräulein Gerard," as they knew her, was not nearly so much engaged then. She danced two or three times with him, and accepted a cup of tea.

Then, at six o'clock!

"And now, may I drive you home?" he asked. "You promised I might, and it would be a pleasure. I brought my car on purpose."

"A most persistent young man," Alixe Gerard told herself. "Very well, you shall drive me home and save me waiting in the rain for a bus, as I should have to otherwise. Do you drive yourself, or have you a chauffeur?"

"No, I drive myself—I'll bring the car round now."

And after that, and a drive in a beautiful Rolls-Royce car, what could Alixe Gerard do but invite him to come in for a second tea or a cocktail? Which invitation was promptly accepted.

"I'd love to—thanks awfully," declared Dennis without a moment's hesitation. "I have been trying and hoping to know and be friends with you ever since I first saw you at the Hotel Karina weeks ago."

It does not matter much where the flats were. Dennis did not even notice, though he followed her directions until they came to a quiet side street in Chelsea, where he left his car and followed her inside the building, and up one flight of stairs.

"A very small affair," she remarked. "I expect yours is palatial compared with it."

The door was opened almost before she touched the bell,

by the woman friend with whom she lived, and who was introduced as Miss Piper.

Elizabeth, as Miss Gerard called her, was probably twenty years the elder. Her hair was gray, and she narrowly missed being ugly—only her kind expression and smile redeeming her plain face. She held open the door, and looked at Dennis with a somewhat quizzical look.

"Come in," she invited. "Tea is ready, and I expect you are tired out, Alixe; even if you are not wet. How did you come home—taxi?"

"No—Rolls-Royce," answered Alixe with a smile. "That's why I asked him to tea. Come into our sitting-room, Mr. Armitage, and sit down. But mind the cat, because he is our mascot and extremely valuable."

Dennis followed her, and immediately had the strange sensation of stepping into a new world.

It was a long high-ceilinged room, evidently two made into one, with windows at each end. Those at the back were curtained in pale fancy net which let in the light without obtruding the outlook. But from the front window one had a far view between the old uneven buildings to the river and across—a view of pale dim sky and sunsets, and trailing smoke and lazy clouds.

The floor was polished and had an Eastern rug in the center. There was a cosy fire in the brick grate, with a "hob" on either side. A grand piano, a huge couch heaped with cushions, a big writing-table in the background by the window, and bookcases and flowers. And in front of the fire a tea-table was temptingly spread.

"How perfectly gorgeous!" exclaimed Dennis like a delighted boy. "I was sure you lived in a place like this, and I did want to come and see."

"Yes, I believe you drove me back on purpose," she retorted, "knowing that afterwards I could not very well help asking you in. Can you eat another tea, or would you rather have a whisky and soda, or a cocktail? I have

had nothing but a cup of tea—I never get time at the 'Karina.' And I have to be at the theater at eight, so I have a good meal now, and supper when I come in. I can recommend Elizabeth's cakes—also her cocktails."

Dennis, however, chose the tea and established himself in one of the most comfortable chairs in which he had ever sat, nursed the cat, and thought himself in Heaven.

"It was most awfully nice of you to let me come," he declared again and again gratefully. "I wanted so much to be friends with you, as you know."

"I had to ask him," Alixe told Elizabeth. "He was both forward and persistent; and I knew he would only worry me if I didn't, and I'd get no rest. Now he'll soon get tired, and leave us alone."

"Indeed I shall not——"

"Oh, yes you will," she smiled at him. "You think, because I dance professionally, that I am gay, and you will meet gay people here and have a jolly time with a go ahead theatrical crowd—I know just what young men think about dancers. But you won't meet anybody here who will interest you in the least; and those you do see will be foreigners whom you dislike. I never mix with my confrères at the theater; and only dance where and when and with whom I choose at the 'Karina.' Here we live quiet and secluded lives—don't we, Elizabeth? We might be nuns!"

"And what does Miss Piper do?" asked Dennis. "Dance also?"

"Heaven forbid!" was that lady's grim answer. "I am a journalist by profession; and housekeeper to Alixe as well, for she does not care about that. I write for women's paper—you know them? You (or rather women, not young men) buy them for twopence, and they tell you how to make your own clothes, nurse babies, cook your husband's dinner, and keep your young man's affection."

"With occasional pictures of Alixe Gerard in her latest dance, or wearing a chemise—or——"

"Really, Alixe! We have a young man to tea!"

"So we have—I forgot! But I expect he knows what a chemise is all the same—he tells me he has sisters."

"And he isn't quite an innocent," retorted Dennis, wondering at the daring of Alixe to wear her hair short, when all other women had yards of it wound in all shapes on their heads. He thought he had never seen anything so charming as the golden-brown, clustering curls which covered her small head; and wondered with the extravagance of youth why every woman did not do the same.

"Where did you get your name 'Alixe' from?" he asked abruptly. "It's rather Russian, isn't it?—but very pretty. Is it short for anything?"

"No—I was always called Alixe," she smiled at him. "I believe I was named after my father, Alexander, but 'Alixe' I have always been. I like your name—Dennis! Shall I call you that?"

"I wish you would." (This was decidedly getting on, and he permitted himself to think how annoyed Jack Eden would be if he could but see and hear him.) "That would be jolly nice of you, and I shall really begin to think you mean to be friends with me."

Elizabeth smiled at Alixe, and the latter smiled back.

"If I come to the Hotel Karina tonight, will you dance with me?" Dennis began to follow up his advantage.

"I shall not be there—I do not go on the nights when I dance there in the afternoon. And you, too—surely you have danced enough for today? Are you so very keen about it? Personally, I dislike it intensely."

"Then what on earth did you take it up as a profession for?" asked Dennis in surprise. "You look as if you thoroughly enjoyed it."

Alixe's eyes deepened in color, and grew peculiarly intense. "Oh, well—it's what I was trained for," she replied. "But I would rather be out of doors. I hate the late nights and hot rooms, and the theater. But I don't mind the 'Karina' afternoons—they are rather fun. Will

you come again? Mondays and Fridays—and I think I shall keep that up until the summer, perhaps July. But I shall not dance in the evenings after Whitsuntide."

"And then?" questioned Dennis. "What comes after that? Of course I shall come again to the 'Karina'—as often as ever you'll have me and dance with me. But in the summer? If we are going to be friends, I don't want to lose sight of you."

"Oh, probably I shall go to a seaside hotel for July, August, and September; as I did last year. They are always anxious to engage a good dancer for their season, to help their entertainments. The—what you call—'Hydros' are the best, for they make a special feature of them; and I like that, and the country or sea, better than London. I hate London."

"You are very astonishing," said Dennis, lighting a cigarette for her, and then one for himself. "I should not have thought you were an 'open air' girl. Do you play golf—tennis?"

"Both—and drive a car." It was Elizabeth who answered in her dry voice. "Alixe the dancer, and Alixe the sports girl, are quite different people."

"That's top-hole then!" declared Dennis. "I must take you down to our golf-course at Longmead, and we'll have a round one Sunday. And in the summer——"

"Who knows what will happen in the summer!" she interrupted, but he could not see her face, for at that moment she was pouring out cream for the cat into a special, fragile saucer.

(Who did know, or guess, in England, what would happen that summer? Not the young people who laughed, danced, flirted, and frittered time away; little thinking how the sands of the hour-glass were slowly slipping down to the appointed day.)

"Yes—I'd love to come out one day with you in your car, Dennis," said Alixe, curling herself again upright in

the corner of the couch. "And we'll drive fast over the hills! Will you take me?"

"Rather—to the end of the world, if you like."

"He's getting on," murmured Elizabeth to the cat. "You'll have to watch him, Alixe, or he'll be another scalp. And scalps get troublesome."

"No, he won't," answered Alixe confidently, "he's not that sort. He's a nice, proper, cold-blooded Englishman, and they don't make good scalps. They don't know how to make love, do they, Dennis? They always stop to think first whether anybody is looking, or if their tie is straight, and their eyeglasses on properly! The only thing the Englishmen are really good at is being miserable! They seem to find a special sort of virtue in being unhappy and cold, and doing their duty—cold baths, and getting up early to breakfast, you know."

"Now, Alixe, be quiet!" broke in the good-natured Elizabeth. "We don't want to hear any more. And do not you take any notice of her, Mr. Armitage; she is always running down the English, and English customs, although she is really half-English herself."

"That's the bad half," laughed Alixe. "And we shall have to turn you out soon, Dennis, for I must have a hot bath before I dress for the theater, and it would not be proper to keep you here as I usually cool off in front of this fire. Elizabeth—I believe he is blushing! Do look quickly——"

"You are enough to make anyone blush," Elizabeth declared severely. "You had better go, Mr. Armitage, before she gets worse. When Alixe is in this mood, I always wonder what she will say next. You can come another time."

"Thanks awfully!" Dennis rose with a laugh. "When? And what about Sunday, if Miss Gerard is going to honor me with her company in my car. Will you come out next Sunday—both of you?" (as an afterthought).

"I thought you went to your country house for Sunday,"

said Alixe quickly. "You told me you had to go home and see your mother."

"I am expected to do so—yes; but I need not. I am my own master, and most certainly if there is a chance of your coming out with me, I won't go. It's beastly dull at home—we do nothing on Sundays but eat, sleep, and go to church."

"That does sound dull, when you might be out and away in the fresh air, and a gorgeous car. Today is Tuesday—I will let you know then, about Sunday, if I shall see you before the week-end."

"You certainly will see me."

A cool hand, a nod of dismissal, and "Show him out, Elizabeth, there's a dear!"

. . . . .

He was not sure whether he liked her or not. She was pretty, dainty, and charming; and when she chose, absolutely sweet to him. And when she didn't choose, Dennis thought she was absolutely horrid; though he would have had to admit that it was a negative horridness, simply because she would not accept all his invitations, nor any of the presents he longed to give her, and tentatively suggested.

"Dear child," she called him, "I never dine alone with any man—and you don't want to be bothered with Elizabeth, even if she would come. And you shouldn't ask dancing ladies to dine with you—it's naughty, and not done; and I'm sure your mother wouldn't approve."

"She certainly wouldn't," replied the discomfited Dennis. "My mother doesn't approve of anything more lively than an old woman's tea-party, or a vestry meeting, if you know what that is. But I can't see why you won't dine with me—I'm quite respectable."

"Perhaps—but I'm not." And Alixe laughed, and lit a cigarette, which caused Dennis to feel slightly embarrassed, because they were having tea at a rather exclusive hotel

at Windsor; and in these days women were still regarded with suspicion if they smoked in public.

It had certainly been one step further in their acquaintance that Alixe had consented to come for a drive on one of her free afternoons, and alone; but he was ruffled that the suggestion of dinner met with such a blank refusal.

"I'm not a stranger to you now—and you said we should be friends."

"Yes—friends." Alixe lifted her queer browny eyes, and regarded him fixedly for a few moments. "But I hope you understand that is all. You mustn't ever overstep it, or it will end—at once."

"All right. I'll be good."

"Promise me you won't fall in love with me!"

It was Dennis's turn to stare, while he reddened at her outspokenness.

"How the dickens can I promise a thing like that! I'll try not to—leave it at that."

Alixe's hand pressed his arm, and for a second he saw beneath her always light, superficially gay manner.

"You are not to!" she ordered him vehemently; and then:

"No—please, Dennis, don't I'd like you for a friend, and a brother (I've never had a brother), but that's all. We must start back—Elizabeth will wonder where I am."

"She's a good old dragon, isn't she?" remarked Dennis. "Oh, the primroses we have picked will square Miss Piper; but let us take her to those woods next Sunday. I'd really like to—I like her."

"How dear of you! Elizabeth likes you, and appreciates being asked out; for she doesn't get much of it. And the primroses are lovely—I have not seen them before." She laughed rather uncertainly. "Stupid, is it not? But I left England when I was a small child, and I do not remember primroses at all—we do not have them in Germany."

"I suppose all the wild flowers are quite different over

there." Dennis was polite, but uninterested. "I have never been to Germany—do you have roses, sweet-peas, poppies?"

"Why, of course—how stupid you are!" She laughed. "Probably there are primroses too, but I do not know of them. Poppies are *Mohnblumen*—which really mean 'cornflowers' because they grow among the corn; only they are different to the blue flowers we call *Kornblumen*, and what you call cornflowers. I love poppies, don't you?"

Dennis was prepared to love anything, from a dandelion upwards, to please and find favor in her eyes; and promptly said he adored poppies.

"Common little red things that grow in the fields all the summer, you mean? Oh, yes—lovely color. Have you been to Norfolk? That's what we call our 'poppyland' —on the East Coast, you know."

For the space of nearly half a minute Alixe hesitated before replying.

"No—not Norfolk. I came to England by the Hook of Holland and Harwich—that is the East Coast, is it not? But no—I have not been to Norfolk and your 'poppy-land.' Will you take me one day?"

"Rather! With pleasure," answered Dennis eagerly. "But it's too far for one day, you know. I have relations who live up there on the East Coast. My uncle is Rector of a country parish—Elverstrand, right on the cliffs; absolutely facing Germany across the North Sea."

"Elverstrand—Norfolk." Alixe drew her brows together. "El-verre-strand! It sounds familiar. I think I used to know somebody who came from that place, but I do not remember very well. Come along—we must go."

She did not wait for his assent, but rose impetuously to her feet, so that Dennis was obliged to follow her.

"Next Sunday then——" he tried to make her promise as they went out to the car. "Don't forget."

"But what about going home?"

"I shall not go."

Alixe laughed, as if that were indeed a joke.

CHAPTER FOUR

NOW came the first cloud across this blue horizon. On Saturday morning Dennis received a letter from his sister Phyllis.

"Mother hopes you have not forgotten that Cicely is coming this afternoon for a few days. She says will you therefore please come down early tomorrow in time for lunch, and then we can take Cicely for a drive in the afternoon. Mother wants to show her the new church at West Green."

. . . . .

Dennis Armitage threw down the letter with a spontaneous and whole-hearted "damn!" Cicely was his cousin and he knew that his mother wanted him to marry her some day. There had never been any suggestion of it, nor the slightest sentiment, between them—she was slightly older than he, and they had been friends since childhood. In the ordinary way, indeed, he would have gone down to Longmead with pleasure, knowing that she was there. But this week-end—No!

He recollected now that he had been told of the forthcoming visit last week; but other, and so much more important, things had come between that it had escaped his memory; and now, with a rueful smile, he remembered, and thought of the trouble there would be if he did not go.

Home—Longmead—his mother and sisters—Cicely, and probably the Rector for lunch! A long dull Sunday, spent mostly in church, and eating; while he might be out in his beautiful car with Alixe, flying down the Portsmouth road,

or by Dorking and Horsham, to the coast. Alixe would sit beside him as she always did, and Miss Piper would tuck herself in behind. They would lunch at some nice hotel, and then go primrosing in the woods.

No—he jolly well wasn't going home this week-end; not, as he told himself in schoolboy slang, for a dead "cert." And he went out for the day so that he could not receive any messages. There was not much chance of it, because they had no telephone at Longmead House; but he wired to his mother that he was unable to come, and there might be a reply.

Nothing happened, however, and Sunday was a perfect day, and an unqualified success. Elizabeth was an excellent chaperon, and gave the impression that she was used to the rôle. Even when they were primrosing she always sought her flowers alone, and disappeared from sight and sound; although there was no need for this, for Alixe obviously had not the slightest desire to be left alone with him, rather to Dennis's discomfiture.

She enjoyed the drive, ate a healthy lunch, and "loved" the primrosing; but she was never serious, and he had no opportunity of a real talk with her as he would have liked. She was in her most teasing mood—she even flirted with him, and he found her absolutely adorable.

They had to return to London after an early tea, however, as they were expecting a friend at their flat; and when Dennis, invited in for a drink, walked into the sitting-room, he was disgusted to discover that this friend was no other than the man he had seen with Alixe at the "Karina," and that he was a German.

He had to admit, however, that foreigner or not, the man had the appearance and manner of a gentleman.

Alixe introduced him by the name of Wertheim, but called him "Otto," and they seemed to have known one another a long time, and when she lived in Germany.

He did not speak such good English as she, but it was nevertheless a matter of surprise and resentment to Dennis

how well he did speak the language; while he, who was supposed to have had the best education possible at one of the first English public schools, could neither speak nor understand a word of German.

He knew a little schoolroom French which had served him in Paris, but that was all his foreign education; and suddenly, for the first time in his life, he felt stupid, uneducated, and at a loss, listening to this trio talking German and English equally well, and translating for him in French.

He wished he had learned languages, and wondered why on earth he had spent years swotting at Latin, every word of which he had promptly and entirely forgotten as soon as his examinations had been passed.

He even wished that his cousin Cicely were there, for she had been at school in Germany, and understood, or said she did, the language.

He informed them of the fact, and said: "She was at a place called Erfurt. Did you ever hear of it?"

"Erfurt!" exclaimed Alixe and Otto Wertheim, both at once. "Yes—of course, and——"

"I come from Erfurt," added Alixe. "And I was at a school there, where we had some English girls. What was her name, Dennis—your cousin——"

"Cicely Harding—she lives in Norfolk. Her father is Rector of a parish on the coast called Elverstrand."

"Yes, yes—I remember Cicelee Harding, she was at our school." Alixe looked at Elizabeth and Otto, and a strange glance passed between them all three.

"We were never exactly friends—Cicelee was older than I. But she was very nice, and oh, so tidy and good!" Alixe held up her hands and plunged into a description of the school, and the English girls with their sailor hats and shirt blouses—their superior ways, and extraordinary customs. She was very funny over it, so that Dennis, although he felt the joke was directed against him and English people generally, could not help joining in the laugh

—also admitting that it was a true description of Cicely, as she was still tidy and good, and oh, so dull!

"I must tell her when I go home tomorrow," he said. "She is spending the week-end at our house, and I am sure she will be most interested."

"Yes—tell her you have met Alixe Helm." Alixe laughed as if it was still a joke. "I was called by my mother's name then, not Gerard; that is my own. I was only sixteen when Cicelee was at school at Erfurt, and I think she was three or four years older."

"She is twenty-seven or -eight," replied Dennis. "At least that. And we see a lot of her at home, for she is a favorite with my mother, while I am very popular with her family in Norfolk. We must arrange it so that you meet her again, Miss Gerard—shall we? Would you like it?"

"Well—yes—no, I don't really know," she hesitated. "One changes so in years. Then I was only a schoolgirl, you see, and so was she; but now——" She left the rest unspoken.

Otto Wertheim said something to her in German. It sounded like *"Ost"* to Dennis, but conveyed no meaning. But—— "Of course I should like to meet Cicelee again," added Alixe, "very much, if you can arrange it before she returns to Norfolk."

. . . . .

The atmosphere was distinctly stormy when Dennis Armitage arrived at Longmead the following evening; and he could detect an ominous note in his mother's voice as he greeted the family, and dutifully pecked her pale cheek.

Outside, it was raining—a contrast to the sunshine of yesterday, just as the stiff Victorian drawing-room was a contrast to Alixe's flat.

He thought he had never seen it look so dull, dark, and

dismal—with its heavy red brocade side curtains, and the old-fashioned fire-grate and coal-box.

There was not a really comfortable chair in the room, and in the center was one of those extraordinary round settees, on which unfortunate guests were forced to sit back to back, in an attitude which made conversation impossible.

Cicely Harding welcomed him, however, with genuine pleasure, and he looked at her with fresh interest because Alixe knew her, and they had been at school together.

Cicely was not pretty. She had a pointed nose, and wore glasses—she was fair, and her teeth were good, which was fortunate, because she showed them whenever she smiled; but any possible attraction which she had possessed for her cousin (not much at any time from a sex aspect) had completely gone now, and he had even difficulty in finding topics to talk to her about.

He wished he could get her alone, and tell her about Alixe; but there was no chance that evening, for, as he expected, the Rector had been invited to dine, and afterwards they all sat in the drawing-room, talked, and had "a little music" until ten o'clock struck.

An interminable, boring evening, which Cicely did not brighten for once, thought Dennis, when it came to an end at last; and with a sigh of relief he said good night, and went down to his own "den" for a pipe. His mother called it his study because, so she said, gentlemen had studies, and not "dens," unless they were like wild beasts. She always insisted upon the room being cleaned regularly, and all his things disturbed; so that it was not really a place of his own like his beloved little flat. But it was the only room in the house in which he might smoke a pipe, and read such papers and novels as he liked.

Tonight, however, even this was denied, for Mrs. Armitage followed him down.

"Why did you not come home on Saturday, Dennis?"

she demanded. "Phyllis wrote and reminded you that Cicely was coming."

"I am sorry," answered Dennis courteously. "But I had a previous engagement for Sunday."

"But you knew Cicely was coming this week-end."

"I forgot, when I made other arrangements."

"You could have put off your engagements—they are never important; and you know that I expect you to be here when there are guests—it is your place."

"I am sorry," repeated Dennis. "I did not look upon Cicely exactly as a guest; and even if I had, it would have made no difference."

"Who were you with then, yesterday?" asked his mother.

A little gleam crept into the young man's eyes—Dennis hated this questioning.

"Friends," he answered briefly. "You don't know the people."

"Dr. Eden's friends, no doubt." Mrs. Armitage pursed her lips in an unpleasant fashion. "Young women, I presume."

"As it happens, they were not Jack Eden's friends, though I cannot see what it matters if they were. I had arranged to take some people out for the day in my car, and I could not very well put them off."

"People whom I do not know, and unless they are influential clients cannot be important enough for you to put off your mother and guests at your own house. Were they men?"

"No," answered Dennis resentfully. "But they were my friends. Surely I have a perfect right to go out where, when, and with whom I choose, and not come home for the week-end unless it suits me. I did not want to disappoint these people—and, anyway, Cicely did not mind."

It was not quite true. He knew in his heart that it would have disappointed himself far more than Alixe if he had not taken them yesterday. She did not care.

"I think you forget yourself, Dennis, when you speak like that," said Mrs. Armitage in her cold, grim voice. "As my only son, now that your father is no longer here, you owe me a duty which should, and must, come first—before your pleasures, your friends, and even your loves! I expect you to comply with, and remember that, and come home when I ask and expect you. Pray remember it; and whoever you were with yesterday, do not let it occur again."

Dennis was his father's son, and Richard Armitage had not always been under his wife's rule, although he had gradually come under her influence. Dennis did not even intend to do that if he could help it.

"I'm afraid it will occur again," he answered affably. "You see, you forget that I'm not a boy to be ordered about, and told to come home just whenever you want me —to have to upset my arrangements and put off my friends just because you have asked Cicely for the week-end. *I* did not ask her, and I can see her any time; and as for the old Rector—he's a fossil, not a man!"

He laughed, for Dennis was always good-tempered, and made the best even of his mother; but he meant it all the same, for lately he had begun to feel that unless he took a firm stand and stood up for himself and his rights, he was never going to be allowed to have any life or freedom —any friends or pleasures of his own.

Mrs. Armitage stared at him in horrified amazement, for he had never so openly defied her before.

"It must have been a woman," she said slowly. "If it were not, you would not take up this extraordinary attitude. I think, as you know I have thought all along, that you had better give up your flat in London, and come home at once."

"I'm sorry, and I beg your pardon." Dennis was quick to apologize, for he hated quarreling. "But you know, Mater, it is rather hard at my age, to be told to come home like a schoolboy every Saturday, whether it suits me or

not. I'm twenty-seven, not a boy; and in this case it was not a woman—at least, I mean to say that I was not alone with any woman. Look here, I'll come down next week-end if Cicely is staying, and take you all out on Saturday. Will that do?"

Mrs. Armitage was not to be conciliated. "Very well—be sure and do so," she agreed grimly. "And, as I have said, do not let it occur again."

She swept out of the room without even bidding him good night, and leaving him filled with uneasy reflections and a distinctly ruffled temper.

He supposed she was right—she was his mother, and a man ought to put his mother and home before anyone or anything in the world; only somehow this idea—this duty, which had seemed so all-important to him ever since he could remember—had shrunk to a shadow in these last few weeks.

The most important thing had changed, and it did not seem nearly so vital to come home as to go to Alixe Gerard's pretty flat, or to the places where she danced.

He fell into a reverie, wondering what Alixe would look like in Longmead House, and how she would "hit it off" with his mother and his sister Phyllis—even Cicely, in these days since she had passed her girlhood. Cicely, with glasses, her long proper skirts, and smooth hair ending in a tidy little bun.

There was Jean, his younger sister, at school again now. Jean was like him, only fair and pretty. It was little Jean at seventeen whom Jack Eden had admired on the one or two occasions he had visited them; and he thought that Alixe might like Jean, and wondered whether, when the holidays came again, he could manage a meeting between them. But he laughed at the bare thought of Alixe here, with her low-necked dresses, short skirts, silk stockings, and high-heeled shoes—her mop of bright hair which she flung about at will, minus a single comb, slide, pin, or net. He could picture her dancing—dancing. He could see her

on a wild rocky coast in a gale on board ship—in those foreign and continental countries which he had never seen —but not shut up in the stuffy respectability of Longmead House, with his mother's cold and criticizing eye upon her.

. . . . .

He told Cicely in the morning, inviting her down to his den for that purpose.

"Oh, yes—I remember her," said Cicely in surprise. "She was the pretty girl of the school, and a beautiful dancer. We understood that her mother had been a professional, and she was going to take it up also; but afterwards I heard from another English girl who was at school a couple of years after I left, that Alixe was married to a German officer. Are you sure she is not married?"

"Oh, no—she is still Miss Gerard. She told me so."

"Which she was not, at school," smiled Cicely. "For there she was Alixe Helm. We always thought she was pure German—she never mentioned her English father, nor that she had any English relatives; and you would have thought she would, to us—wouldn't you? Are they alive, do you know?"

"I don't. She doesn't speak of them, but she certainly says her father is English; and I think she spoke of him as being in the Army."

"Rather vague," said Cicely dryly. "Is she still pretty? I think Alixe was the only really pretty German girl I ever saw. I cannot say I really liked the Germans, you know; but mother had been at that school in 1880, and wanted me to go there as well. She thought it would be so good for my music too, and I should get better lessons than in England. Rather an old-fashioned idea it was; and sometimes since then, when people have asked me where I was at school, I must admit I wished that I had gone to Cheltenham or St. Andrews."

Dennis was not interested in what Cicely wished, nor what she had done. He wanted to talk about Alixe.

"She is dancing professionally now," he continued. "Two afternoons and every night at the Karina Hotel, and at the 'Argosy' as well. The 'Karina' is a new place that I don't suppose you have heard much about. They dance every evening after dinner until midnight, and there are exhibition dances, and all that sort of thing—a kind of cabaret, you know."

"Cabaret!" Cicely looked shocked. Was it possible her cousin visited such places? She voiced her thoughts.

"Perfectly respectable, of course," he answered impatiently. "Merely a restaurant where one can dance. It isn't ballet dancing like the 'Empire,' or anything like that. Alixe does minuets, tangos, foxtrots, etc."

"I see. And do you know her very well? You call her by her christian name."

"Oh—that was a slip," he laughed. "I don't—I call her Miss Gerard, and she is very prim, and proper, and particular. I met her when I was at the 'Karina' one evening in February, and I've been to her flat once or twice. She lives with a friend—a German lady."

"Another dancer? Dennis—how shocked your mother would be if she knew; which I am sure she doesn't."

"She doesn't; but there is nothing to be shocked at, all the same—especially as you were both at the same school. You say her relatives lived at Erfurt too?"

"Her German relatives—yes; but what of the mythical British?" Cicely did not mean to be unkind, but it was rather disconcerting, even to her serene mind, to find that Dennis was on such terms of friendship with this German dancer.

However: "Of course, I'd like to see her again very much," she added quickly. "But I'm afraid I shall call her Miss—or rather, Fräulein Helm. I cannot get used to her with an English name. Perhaps we could all have tea together one afternoon next week, Dennis."

"That would be splendid," answered Dennis eagerly. "But why not lunch or dinner? I'll arrange it."

"No—I can't do that. I am going to stay with my friends at Hampstead—you remember Margaret Dacre, who used to teach in Sunday School at Elverstrand? She married a clergyman, and they live at Hampstead. I never come near London without spending two or three days with them. But I could easily have tea with you one afternoon in the West End at Fuller's or Callard's, or some nice shop like that; and perhaps Alixe would come."

"Why not the Karina Hotel where she dances, and gives lessons Tuesdays and Fridays?"

Cicely demurred. She did not know the "Karina," but was sure that if Alixe Helm was dancing there it could not be as respectable as Callard's, Fuller's, or Buzzard's. And she did not think it was quite right of Dennis to suggest she tell his mother nothing about it.

But Cicely was feminine enough to want to meet her cousin, and as she was a clergyman's daughter, and this was only 1914, she could not meet him alone in the West End of London. Therefore this suggestion of a reunion with an old schoolmate was quite useful.

She agreed with a little proper hesitation.

CHAPTER FIVE

DENNIS Armitage went back to London the following morning, and was at the "Karina" that same night.

But Alixe was not alone. The man with whom he had seen her before, and whom he had met at her flat, was there all the time, and she made no attempt to get rid of him even for a minute; although Dennis hinted broadly that he wished to speak to her.

So eventually the invitation was given before Herr Wertheim, who listened to every word.

"With pleasure," said Alixe indifferently. "Bring Cicelee to the 'Karina.' No—I can't get away for tea. Oh, very well—just for half an hour. It will be fun to see her again. You come too, Otto—and we will see if she has forgotten all her German. Dennis, my dear little boy—why so glum? Don't you want Otto? But Cicelee might fall in love with him!"

The idea was so funny that Dennis burst out laughing, and it was Otto Wertheim's turn to glower; for like a true son of the Fatherland he had no sense of humor, and could not take Alixe's teasing and jokes even as well as Dennis did.

"Yes, yes—you come too, Otto," she insisted, "or I won't go. Where shall we have tea then, Dennis? Oh—Fuller's!" She pulled a wry face. "But the tea and cakes are good. Very well; let me know which day—not Friday."

"I'll telephone Cicely, and then let you know at your flat—shall I?"

"If you like. Otto—let us have some *Eis Kaffee flüssig* —ice coffee—yes? You order some!"

Dennis did not like Otto Wertheim the least bit.

. . . . .

But he liked him even less a night or two later, when he went to Alixe's flat to tell her he had arranged for Tuesday with Cicely.

Elizabeth opened the door to him, and invited him in.

"But Alixe is not at home," she told him with a blunt smile. "She is dining out with Otto Wertheim, and going on to a theater."

("I never dine alone with any man," Alixe had told him, refusing his invitation finally. Yet she was dining with this beastly German alone this evening, and going to the theater with him!)

"Come to tea on Sunday," invited Elizabeth, noticing his downcast looks, and sorry for his disappointment.

"I've got to go home next week-end—I can't," replied Dennis. "And Monday, Miss Gerard isn't here. I'll see her at the 'Karina'—will you tell her so, Miss Piper? Then perhaps she'll look out for me, and wait."

"Yes—I'll tell her." Elizabeth looked at him hesitatingly, as if there was something she would like to have said. But she did not say it; and refusing her invitation to come in, Dennis turned disgustedly down the stairs again, half-wishing he had never come up—even that first day a month ago.

When he taxed Alixe about dining alone with a man, after refusing to listen to him, she only laughed.

"Why, of course—why not? I've known Otto for years —since I was a child. I always dine with and take him about when he is in London. Otto gets me my engagements; no, he is not my manager exactly—I don't need one. Nor is he an agent; but he knows a lot of people in the profession, and can manage these things. He returns to Berlin on Wednesday."

"Thank God!" sighed Dennis fervently. "And I hope he stays there. But you said you never dined alone with *any* man!"

Alixe's eyes crinkled up with laughter. "But Otto isn't a man—he's old. Older than my father, I am sure. Also —it's business."

"Still, you might come out to dinner with me. I asked Elizabeth, and even that was no use."

"Am I not coming to tea with you tomorrow, to meet the calm and amiable Cicelee? What more do you ask?"

Dennis could have asked for very many things more, but for the sake of this sweet (if dangerous) friendship, he refrained; deciding to bide his time until Cicely had returned to her Rectory, and Otto Wertheim to his Fatherland.

. . . . .

That tea was not a great success although Alixe was quite charming, and "on her best behavior," as she told Dennis afterwards. Cicely, too, was quite at ease—a little superior perhaps, and decidedly cold with Herr Wertheim whom she regarded as an interloper; but quite cordial with Alixe, although she referred to her more than once as "Miss Helm."

But there was *something;* and though Dennis could not place it, he knew it was there—something discordant. And though he told himself that it was Otto Wertheim, yet he knew it was not only that, and was relieved when the hour was over and he had said good-by to Alixe, and driven his cousin to Hampstead.

. . . . .

For a little while after that the friendship took a normal course.

Dennis went to the flat once or twice a week, and occasionally Alixe condescended to drive with him. There were more Sundays when he did not go home, to

his mother's annoyance; and there was much chaffing on the part of Jack Eden.

Then Alixe's dancing at the Argosy Theatre came to an end. She went to Germany for a week or two, and when she returned in May there was only the "Karina" engagement continuing; so that Dennis's only opportunity of seeing her was either there or at her flat, with Elizabeth as chaperon.

"Aren't you getting another engagement at the theater?" he asked her one evening when he was stretched lazily in one of their easy-chairs, watching the last of the sunset over the Thames where Hammersmith Bridge stood out black against the early summer sky.

"I don't think so," said Alixe. "It isn't worth while for six weeks—it would end in July. And I do not want to stay in London all the summer. I am thinking of a hotel—I must see about it."

"Absolutely rotten!" declared Dennis. "I shall see nothing of you unless I come and stay at the same hotel, wherever it may be. By Jove! That's an idea, and I'll do it if you tell me where you are going."

"Perhaps I will—perhaps I won't," yawned Alixe. "It depends if you are a good boy. Next week it is, what you call Whitsuntide, and what we call *Pfingsten,* is it not? I am going to the coast to see about a summer engagement."

"Oh, are you?" Dennis sat up. "I'll drive you, if you will let me. Where are you going? South Coast?"

"No, East—perhaps Scarborough, or Felixstowe. I do not know yet. And I have friends near Bury St. Edmunds, in the country—I go to spend a day or two there."

"Why—that is near Norfolk—Felixstowe, and Bury St. Edmunds. You might just as well let me drive you down, as I'm going to Norfolk myself for Whitsuntide, to stay with my cousins—the Hardings, you know."

"Oh—you go to stay with Cousin Cicelee!"

"Well, they have asked me, but I wanted to see what you were going to do before I accepted," lied Dennis barefacedly, not having received an invitation at all, and wondering whether he could manage one. Oh, yes—of course he could! He had only to write a nice letter to Cicely, and say he would like to spend the holiday with her.

"What about Miss Piper?" he asked.

Elizabeth, it appeared, had "business" which was taking her to Brussels for the week-end.

"Perhaps I won't go," said Alixe suddenly. "There is the cat to be thought of—Bobs does not like to be left alone."

"That is just because you don't want me to drive you," retorted Dennis. "You know perfectly well that you intend to go, or you would not have mentioned it."

They were alone, for Elizabeth had gone to the offices of her woman's paper; and Alixe glanced at the clock.

"It is quarter-past nine," she remarked idly. "Do you not think it is time you went home? We have no chaperon, and I am sure your mother would not approve."

"So am I," murmured Dennis. "But I can't help that; and what on earth do we want a chaperon for? It's a change to get you without Elizabeth. And look here, don't be horrid! Let's arrange something for Whitsuntide. If you won't let me drive you down, meet me one day; I'll drive into Bury St. Edmunds, or Felixstowe, or wherever you are, and we'll lunch together. Be a good sport, Alixe!"

This time she leveled her eyes upon him. "I did not say you might call me Alixe—and please do not do so except when we are alone. If you are not going, shall we make some coffee? Elizabeth will want some when she comes in, and you can help me, and make yourself useful."

Dennis loved this—to feel at home in her little flat, and be of use to her. He rose with alacrity, and followed her into the little kitchen.

"I wish we had a jolly little place like this at home—our kitchen is a huge place, and the cook is fat and old. She has been with us for twenty years, and used to lend me pans when I was a kid, to take up to the schoolroom and make toffee in. Jean and I used to do it—Phyllis was too grown up, and afraid of soiling or burning her fingers—but Cicely used to help when she stayed with us. Jean is eighteen—I believe you might like her; she is a nice kid, but Phyllis is more like the Mater."

"I'd love to see your mother," said Alixe mischievously. "But I expect she would not like nor approve of me."

"You shall meet her," answered Dennis; but he did not look at her as he spoke, and hunted for the matches. "Where do you keep them?—I've got none."

"Men never have." Alixe lit the gas-ring. "Otto is just the same—he borrows mine, and forgets to return them, every time he comes."

"Damn!" exclaimed Dennis wholeheartedly. "I burnt my finger. Is your Otto always here?'

"Not as often as you are," retorted Alixe. "Here—go and sit down and suck your finger, or put some salad oil on it. Men are no use; and, dear me, what a fuss they make when they are hurt! Shall I kiss it and make it well?"

"Yes, please—that would do it much more good than salad oil," laughed Dennis, holding it out. But she had moved away, and took no notice.

"Well—what about meeting you at Whitsun?" he persisted when the coffee was made, and taken into the sitting-room. "Where are you going—and when?"

"I go to Scarborough first." She lit a cigarette. "And on perhaps Saturday or Sunday—no, I forget, there are no trains on Sundays in England. Then Saturday I return to—Cromer. There are hotels at Cromer, are there not? I will go and look round——"

"Cromer is only five miles from Elverstrand, so I'll meet you there. On Saturday? Yes? But you'll have to

stay there for the week-end, you know—you can't travel on Sunday or bank holiday——"

"I can," said Alixe unexpectedly, "if I borrow a car. Yes—I think that is best. I go to Scarborough, and then to Cromer, Felixstowe, and so to Little Hollow, where I stay. I let you know, Dennis—but Cromer if you like on Saturday. Ah—I hear Elizabeth——"

For the second time Dennis said "damn!" But this was in an undertone.

CHAPTER SIX

EVEN before it happened, Dennis wondered what brought Alixe to Cromer, when but a short time before she had told him that she had never been on the East Coast, except to Harwich, where she had landed.

Of course, her wish to obtain an engagement for the summer season at some big hotel explained it (or did it not?), but why was she so particularly keen upon the East Coast, when the South was so much more fashionable and pleasanter? Brighton, Bournemouth, or Eastbourne? Last year she had been at Southsea, and loved it, so she said. Why not, he asked her, go back there? Why to far-away Scarborough, or rather old-fashioned Cromer? There were better hotels on the South Coast, and it was warmer; and there were more people.

Alixe agreed. She had come from Scarborough yesterday, and said she did not like it after all. Neither did she like Cromer, now that she was here. It was grey and old, and had no proper esplanade. She would go to look at Felixstowe next, and then into the country for a few days to stay with friends.

No—she would not tell Dennis where it was; neither could he drive her there. She wished to be left alone; and not even Dennis and his Rolls-Royce car would be welcome at the house to which she was going.

Dennis had had to tell Cicely that Alixe was in Cromer because, as a guest at the Rectory, he could not very well go out to lunch without saying where and with whom. And immediately the Rector had suggested that Dennis should bring "Miss Helm" back to tea.

"At school with Cicely? But how charming! Why have you not told us about her—and so near, too! Of course, Miss—what did you say, Dennis—Gerard? What, Cicely, Helm?—must come to tea."

Cicely had looked somewhat dismayed. She had not thought about Alixe again, and had no idea that she was in the neighborhood, nor that she and Dennis were on such friendly terms; and she did not particularly want her, especially this week-end when she had hoped to have her cousin to herself. But, of course, she could not say so, and had to second her father's invitation.

Alixe had accepted it, too, rather to Dennis's surprise. She said she would be delighted to drive over with him and see dear "Cicelee" at home; and about four o'clock they left Cromer together.

"You were right to call it 'Poppyland'," she remarked, as they drove through the lanes with fields of ripening corn on either side. "Nothing but sea—I never saw such a wide expanse of sea in my life—sand, corn, and poppies. Look—they are like a scarlet flag; no—a carpet, or a pool of blood!"

"Well, you are cheerful!" declared Dennis disgustedly, driving straight as an arrow, with a cigarette between his lips and a warm glow in his heart, for this was an unexpected pleasure. He wondered whether he could maneuver an invitation for her for the whole of tomorrow so that they could spend the day together—could bathe, and lounge, and laze—if she would accept again as she had so readily accepted today. Perhaps she liked him after all, although she teased and sat on him.

If she hadn't wanted to see him, why had she let him know that she was coming to Cromer? She need not have done so, for he wouldn't have heard. And why was she here with him, driving to a homely tea and supper at a country Rectory?

"You are very quiet, Dennis?" she asked suddenly.

"I—oh, well—I'm driving," he answered evasively.

"Dennis dear, you belong to the generation which have driven since their childhood; you are as much at home in a car as on your feet. The next generation will be absolutely born to motoring. So don't tell me that you are quiet because you have to drive. I believe you are nervous."

"Nervous of what? You—or the car?"

"You do not know how I shall behave at your cousin's house—if they will like me, and approve. But they will, except Cicelee. Cicelee does not approve!" She laughed softly, like the tinkle of music. "You need not be nervous, Dennis."

"I'm not, for whatever you do or say, or however you behave, you will always be charming—to me. It is I who will not appear at my best—a man seldom does among his own people. Do you drive a car yourself, Alixe?"

"Yes." She rapped out the word. "Dennis—what gorgeous woods! I love your England—it is so green. Our woods are nearly all firs, but those beeches! Look at the color! And these lovely narrow lanes with the high hedges and banks of flowers—perfect!"

They drove through the quaint old village and up a steep hill towards the sea. There was the old gray square-towered church in a garden of half-buried graves, ivy-covered, ancient, and gloomy; and beyond it, almost on the cliffs, the old gray Rectory.

The Hardings welcomed Alixe with enthusiasm. Somebody new, pretty, and young, from London and the continent, wearing the smartest, latest-fashioned clothes, silk stockings, and suède shoes!

Mrs. Harding awoke into animation and began talking. The Rector told of places to see; of history and folklore. The schoolboys brought butterfly collections, stamps, and cigarette cards. Alixe had never found herself more popular.

Only Cicely smiled a little sadly and felt out of it, while Dennis, though he liked to see Alixe made a fuss of, could

not help wishing before the evening was over that they could have been a little bit more alone. It was all very well bringing her here, but he admitted to himself that he had hoped to get at least a walk with her along the cliffs.

After tea, while Dennis smoked in the garden, Cicely showed Alixe to her room and talked a little, as girls will.

"Strange that you and Dennis should have met as you did, isn't it? And become such friends," she began, watching Alixe brushing her lovely burnished-gold hair. "I had no idea he went to such places—I mean, dances, night clubs, cabarets, or whatever they are called. But I suppose in these days they are quite all right."

"Oh, quite," smiled Alixe, refusing to see the barbed point. "Did you think the Karina Restaurant was one of those dark, dirty, disreputable cellars like you see at the cinematograph shows? Not a bit of it—it's a new and beautiful up-to-date restaurant. You ought to get your cousin to take you to dinner or supper there the next time you are in London—it's worth seeing." And she powdered her nose with a puff from an onyx box mounted in gold, at which Cicely's eyes widened considerably.

"Dennis is such a quiet, good boy," she said; "too good, I have thought sometimes—he does whatever his mother commands, and doesn't do what she dislikes. A pity, I think, for a young man to be tied quite so tightly to his mother's apron-strings. And he isn't really a boy—Dennis is twenty-seven."

Alixe shook out her soft *crêpe de Chine* dress. It was rather low for that year and showed her white throat and a "V" of white neck round which she wore a gold chain with a pendant of turquoises matching her ear-rings. Her dress was too short also for Cicely's taste and approval—it showed her ankles in pale gray silk stockings above the suède shoes. The girl wondered that her parents had made no remark about this costume, but they had seemed just delighted with their unexpected guest, and charmed with her appearance.

"Is he so old?" questioned Alixe innocently. "I did not think it—he always seems a boy to me. I have not met his mother, nor anybody belonging to him except you; and he has not appeared to me to be, as it were, under orders."

"Oh, but he is—you haven't seen it. I doubt if Dennis will ever marry, as he can't, and won't, do so without her full consent and approval. He is not a marrying man either, do you think? Just imagine—he has never had a love-affair!"

"I can't imagine it." Alixe laughed outright. "And I'm afraid I don't believe it, either. Every man by the time he is Dennis's age has had half a dozen. I expect he keeps them a secret, however."

"Oh, but Dennis has no secrets from me," answered Cicely assuredly. "From his mother—yes; and that is quite natural under the circumstances; but he has always told me all his secrets and troubles. I've been his confidante since we were tiny. And even if, as I say, his mother did not know—I should."

"Really?" Alixe was looking at herself again in the rather inadequate mirror, and did not turn. "How very nice for you!"

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They went down to a cold supper and afterwards sat in the Rectory drawing-room while Cicely played the piano for them, and the Rector showed Alixe photographs of the neighborhood and of his family, including Dennis at all ages from babyhood up to the present.

Dennis had always liked this room as a contrast to the stiff Victorianism of their drawing-room at Longmead. It had a faded carpet with roses on it, plush curtains, and comfortable chairs with washed and faded chintz covers. There were bookcases with old-fashioned novels and religious books, albums of photographs and religious pic-

tures which, as a little boy, had fanned his imagination and made him feel holy.

But it did not make him feel at all holy tonight—he was bored and impatient.

Was Cicely going to play the whole evening? And how she banged! It was almost like a mechanical piano-player! He nearly laughed to think how angry she would be if she guessed his thoughts.

And was his uncle going to show Alixe every photograph in the house?

He rose to his feet, unable to sit still any longer; and at the same moment Alixe closed the photograph album.

"Oh, Cicelee!" she cried, "do you remember that song you used to sing at school about the 'Garden of Sleep'? It was all about churches, and graves, and poppies. Do you know it, Dennis?"

"I don't sing." Cicely turned from the piano. "I never could nor wished to; but I took all branches of music when I was studying in Germany. I have not got the song now, and I do not know it by ear."

"I am sorry," said Alixe. "I liked its mournful tune and words:

"Oh, Life of my life, on the cliffs by the sea,
By the flowers in the grass I am waiting for thee.

It's so funny. As if anyone would meet a lover in a churchyard! I wouldn't."

Dennis explained that the song had been written about this part of Norfolk; and the "Tower in ruins" was still standing on the edge of the cliff near Cromer.

"But the words are: 'By the graves in the grass', not 'flowers'," put in Cicely. "You have not got it right. I don't care for the song myself—it's too sentimental."

"Yes, of course—I see." Alixe looked meek and corrected. "But don't you think that 'flowers' sounds much prettier than graves? Why, to meet one's lover in a

graveyard—oh, what a death to romance! But in a meadow of flowers——"

There was no reply, and Cicely rose from the piano as if to end the subject.

After a minute Alixe, too, rose, and said that: "Really, she must go."

"I'll bring the car around at once," said Dennis, waking up immediately.

. . . . .

The invitation for Sunday had been given and accepted by Alixe with astonishing alacrity, and on the drive back to Cromer Dennis and she arranged, with a sense of guilt and much amusement, not to arrive at the Rectory until dinner-time.

Alixe confided in him that she adored swimming, and had her bathing-suit with her; and Dennis knew of a gorgeous creek further along between Elverstrand and Mundesley where there were low rocks which made excellent dressing-boxes and a strip of sandy beach, and they would have it to themselves on Sunday morning.

"We simply can't spend the whole of a gloriously hot summer day at the Rectory: it's so infernally dull! And Cicely will only play to us for hours—as if we didn't have enough last night! I meant to do this all along, if you accepted their invitation."

He had had to tell Cicely, however, and she had to agree because there was no other course open.

Alixe was a Roman Catholic, so could not be asked to come to church; and Dennis was at liberty to please himself, although it was the first time he had failed to put in an appearance on Sunday morning.

So she said nothing, and Dennis hurried away.

Down on the beach beneath the high cliff, in the sun, they were like a couple of children on a holiday.

"Have a cigarette?" suggested Dennis, when the first swim over they sat on the rocks amid the sand in their

bathing-wraps. "You did not smoke at the Rectory last night, I noticed."

"Naturally; I knew they wouldn't approve, and I wanted to be good and proper for your sake. Was I all right?"

"Rather! They were absolutely charmed with you—you were just perfect, only—only don't let my uncle show you any more photographs tonight, will you?"

They both laughed, but not unkindly.

"You ought to have gone to church, you know," said Alixe suddenly, "and fetched me afterwards. It's not fair of you to have deserted Cicelee like this."

"It is a holiday—I get enough church-going at home."

"Yes, but Cicelee expected you, I am sure. Oh, light my cigarette from yours—it's gone out."

Their heads were close together, and the breeze blew her hair across his face. Dennis thought she was the most lovely thing on earth.

"You told me once that you were training to be a domesticated husband," she laughed. "You might begin by going to church and carrying the books!"

"The books are kept at church," retorted Dennis. "And I didn't tell you I was training to be a domesticated husband for Cicely, I am sure. That remark was made to you, as far as I can remember, one day when I was helping you to get tea at your flat."

"So it was." Alixe threw pebbles into the sand below the rock on which they sat. "Still, do you know, Dennis, I don't believe Cousin Cicelee would say 'No,' if you asked her."

"I haven't asked her, and I've no intention of doing so."

"How ungallant! She told me she thought you would never marry; perhaps she was right."

He turned to stare at her in surprise. "Why ever not?"

"I don't know. She said you had never even had a love-affair—yet."

There was a moment's pause; then Dennis said dryly:

"I'm afraid Cicely wouldn't be likely to know about it if I had—or had not. And may I inquire when this intimate conversation concerning my humble self took place? And why?"

But now Alixe only laughed and threw stones, and for the first time Dennis felt a smouldering resentment against her for her careless talk, her laughter, and indifference.

He wished again that she would be serious, if only for a few minutes; but she only laughed when he told her so.

"I'm an adventuress!" she mocked. "For all you know, I may be a 'vamp' of the worst type."

"You're a mystery," answered Dennis unsmilingly, "and a very charming flirt. But I don't somehow think you are an adventuress. What puzzles me most is your profession, for you haven't the soul of a dancer—of that I'm sure. You swim magnificently, you play golf as well as I do—and I rather flatter myself—and you walk like an athlete. I expect, though I haven't seen you, that you drive a car like a man, and know all about engines and gears; and yet you dance as a profession! Why?"

"Don't I dance well, then?" she asked in mock dismay.

"Of course you do—physically. But you haven't the soul of a dancer—you do not give me the impression that you dance for sheer love of it, and chose it as your profession because you do, as dancers must."

Alixe did not speak for a second or two and, afraid that he had offended her, he hastened to add:

"Forgive me—I've no right to question or criticize. I'm not a lawyer because I love the profession, so I ought not to talk. I simply made the best of it, and perhaps you had to do the same. It pays, I suppose."

"Yes, I made the best of it." She laughed, but now there was a strange note of tragedy in her laugh—or was it merely recklessness?

"But—oh, no, it certainly does not pay. I don't make a living out of two hours' dancing at the Karina Hotel and the one turn I gave each night at the Argosy Theatre

Revue. But why talk of it? It's all in a lifetime—all adventure! Let's go in again and have one more swim before we dress."

Dennis did not move. He sat upright, clasping his knees and staring at her as she stood half-wrapped in her cloak, poised on a rock like a statue of splendid youth.

"I suppose you know how beautiful you are!" he said. "Scores of men must have told you so."

"Stupid boy!" she answered lightly, and she took off her cloak and threw it at him.

Dennis caught it, and was on his feet in a moment, racing after her along the sand by the edge of the sea. He caught her as she was about to plunge in, and held her by a gold bracelet which she wore high up on her arm beneath the short sleeve of her bathing-tunic. It was not an ordinary "slave bangle" either, as he suddenly noticed, but a tight thin band of gold, on the clasp of which were the letters: "C. W.," and the number "31."

"What an extraordinary bangle!" he exclaimed, forgetting the chase as he saw it. "Doesn't it hurt you, being so tight? And what do the letters mean——?"

Alixe tore herself roughly from his hand and pulled down her sleeve.

"Never seen a gold bracelet before? You are an innocent!"

"I've seen plenty, but not like that one. I wish you'd let me look——"

"I won't—don't touch me! There is nothing to see. I thought women were supposed to be curious, but they are not half so much so as men. What business is it of yours?"

"None." Dennis stood still, staring at her, for her temper was not usually so quickly ruffled. "But I can't help a bit of curiosity about you, you know. You wear a queer ring with a cross on it—and now a close-fitting bangle with letters——"

But Alixe had gone.

She had plunged into the gleaming water and was swimming like a fish. As she went, she called back:

"You needn't wait for me! I can find my way to the Rectory. Go and meet Cicelee at the church door."

Dennis did not follow her into the sea: he returned to the rock and sat down, lighting a cigarette.

She was indeed a mystery girl to him, and he felt that he was no nearer knowing and understanding her now than at the beginning of their acquaintance.

"Some man, I suppose," he thought resentfully, as he watched her swimming out far beyond the rocks. "I expect all this mystery is about someone whose bracelet she wears, and 'C. W.' are his initials, no doubt. Anyway, I touched the real Alixe that time—she was almost cross. But I wish she would tell me—I should understand."

He liked to think he would, watching her without attempting to follow, puzzling over her with her love of open air sports, her joy in simple things, and her utter lack of sex consciousness.

Obviously, to Alixe, there was nothing strange or questionable, let alone improper, in her bathing alone with him like this; but he chuckled to think what Cicely would have felt under similar circumstances.

Cicely did not approve of mixed bathing at all—but most certainly, if she had, she would not have bathed alone with him, undressing among the rocks, and lying wrapped in a colored toweling cloak between the swims.

In Cicely's opinion a girl should not be seen by a young man unless she was completely dressed from throat to wrist and ankle and her hair done up on her head.

Alixe could not "do up" her beautiful curls, and she showed considerably more than her ankles. Yet the effect upon Dennis was such that he felt only reverence and a worship for her beautiful, innocent womanhood.

Actually Dennis Armitage had seen little or none of the "seamy side" of life, nor had he tasted its bitter fruit. One or two designing young women had tried to trap him

into matrimony, knowing that not only was he well off now, good-looking, and altogether elegible, but would have quite a golden inheritance; and some had made advances to him which had merely made him desperately uncomfortable and frightened him off women for weeks together; but the majority of his girl acquaintances were sensible, nice young people, like his sisters and Cicely.

A little harmless flirting had been their and his worst vice, and so he had passed on, with a certain amount of knowledge gained partly out of curiosity, and partly not to be left behind by his men friends—but heartfree, and with a natural, still somewhat boyish respect for all women.

He remained where he was until Alixe came in from the sea, her white skin glistening like satin. She was quite herself again, and hailed him gaily:

"Why didn't you come in? It was glorious! Isn't it time we dressed?"

"I was afraid I had offended you." He scrambled to his feet. "I thought you wanted to get rid of me. You told me to leave you."

"Yes, but, of course, I didn't mean it. Didn't you know that? I thought you would follow me."

"I'm afraid I'm a bit of a fool," said Dennis humbly. "I thought you had had enough of me and my impertinence."

Alixe smiled at him and touched his hand.

"Don't ask too many questions—that's all. I am an adventuress—and Alixe Gerard, the dancer. But you are very nice, Dennis, and I'm really not a bit offended."

Dennis's gray-blue eyes turned black, and he stammered out something so incoherent that Alixe took alarm.

"I must fly to my rocky castle and dress," she added hastily. And she skipped away before he could lay hands upon her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUNDAY'S dinner at the Rectory was not a very inspiring meal, and little was talked about except the church service. There were no Sunday papers, and no coffee and cigarettes to follow the meal. They sat in a solemn circle in the garden until tea, and after that Cicely and her father accompanied them on a walk along the cliffs as far as Trimmingham.

Alixe walked with the Rector, and Dennis with his cousin. Alixe was most interested in the cliffs, the caves below, the many and various paths and steps to the beach and the possibility of underground passages leading from the caves inland.

The Rector had seldom known such an intelligent listener, and he talked enthusiastically, telling her not only all he knew, having lived here for twenty years, but all the folklore of the countryside.

She stood by the edge of the steep, smooth, green cliff, looking out over the sunlit sea with grave, far-seeing eyes which nobody understood.

"The North Sea—and Germany is straight across from here—how strange! If the Germans ever invaded England they would, I suppose, land somewhere about here—off this coast."

"They'll never invade England—don't you believe it!" laughed Dennis. "They'd never get a chance to land! And if they did, they'd never get out again."

"You don't think so?" Alixe did not move her eyes from the vast expanse of gray water. "I suppose you are right. Are there many Germans, I wonder, living along this coast, looking at their Fatherland across the sea?"

"I don't know of any," put in Cicely bluntly. But her father interrupted:

"Well, there is Mr. Myerling over at Blecton. I think he is German; or is it Dutch, Cicely? He speaks like a German."

"It would be dreadful if there was a war," said Alixe in her strange level voice.

"My dear Alixe, there never will be a war," Cicely laughed. "Will there, Dennis? Did you bring that notion over with you from Erfurt?"

"We're more than a match for Germany any day," added Dennis. "It wouldn't last a month! And they couldn't possibly land an army here."

"I believe it would be possible," said the Rector. "Didn't William le Queux write a book called 'The Invasion of 1910,' which proved that the Germans could land an army near here, at Weybourne? The water is extraordinarily deep there, you know, and quite big boats could be brought close in to the shore. But I can't imagine such a thing happening—we are much too friendly with Germany. Why should she want to attack us?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed Alixe, and suddenly she laughed. "And why on earth do we talk of war on such a lovely evening! Tell me, now, Mr. Harding, what do all your people do? How do they live, and earn money?"

The walk continued, and then the Rector had to go to church to take Evensong; and supper over, Alixe declared that she must leave as she had to make an early start to-morrow to reach Felixstowe by lunch-time.

"But how are you going?" asked Dennis in dismay. "You won't get a decent train on bank holiday!"

"No, I know that, but I have ordered a car," was her reply. "It is important that I should arrive there, and I cannot wait for trains."

"A car!" echoed Cicely and her parents. "Why, it will cost you pounds!"

Dennis did not speak. It was on the edge of his tongue

to say: "I'll drive you." But he remembered in time that he was a guest here, and it would scarcely be polite on his part, therefore, to spend the day driving Alixe to Felixstowe, or anywhere else, unless Cicely came, too, which would spoil the whole thing. So he refrained, deciding to wait for a better opportunity.

Now Alixe was making her "adieux" prettily, and saying how much she had enjoyed herself, and how lovely it was of the Hardings to have asked her.

"We have enjoyed having you," said Cicely politely but without enthusiasm, for, in her opinion, she and her parents had been very kind to ask a professional dancer to the Rectory for the day and an evening. As a clergyman's daughter, naturally she did not approve of dancing in a night restaurant or a theater as a profession, nor did she approve of her cousin Dennis's friendship with such a person. She thought the condescension was all on their side, and wondered whether her "Aunt Augusta" (Dennis's mother) knew—what she thought, and if she would have asked Alixe to Longmead House.

Alixe was really thankful the day was over, had she told the truth, for she read disapproval all over Cicely's face. Something else also; and it had needed no words to tell her how things stood at the Rectory.

Mrs. Harding had let drop hints about "dear Dennis and Cicely." Dennis's portrait stood in every room, and a large photograph of him on Cicely's grand piano in the drawing-room, so it was quite sufficient for the experienced Alixe Gerard and her sure intuition to watch her one-time school-friend and know that all her serious, church-loving, domesticated heart was given to this nice young cousin of hers, who, on his part, had not a thought for her.

. . . . .

"Need we drive straight back to Cromer?" asked Dennis when they had left the Rectory behind and were gliding

down the lane to the main road. "It's a gorgeous night and only just past ten o'clock. Can't we go for a drive?"

"Yes, if you like." Alixe was wide awake, and her eyes were like stars. "I thought they had had enough of me at your cousin's, though your uncle is rather a dear old thing, Dennis. He 'hoped to meet me again' when they come up to London in July—do you know that? Is he not naughty? And I a professional dancer! Cicelee did not hope though." She laughed gaily. "They are coming up for a church conference. Dennis, what is a church conference? Do you know?"

"It is you who are naughty!" laughed Dennis. "No, I don't know what it is. Something where they all talk, I imagine, and air their opinions. Where shall we go?"

"Will Cicelee be there, too?"

"Not at the conference, of course—women aren't. But she is coming up to London with my uncle—she always does. Her mother is not strong enough, you see."

"And don't they trust the poor dear alone! How sad. Oh, let us drive through Cromer and along to that part of the cliffs where your uncle said the sea is so deep. I should like to see it. Are the cliffs there like these—caves?"

"I really don't know," answered Dennis in surprise. "I've never been; and you can't see anything tonight—it's too dark until the moon rises."

"And there is nothing to see now?"

"Not that I have ever heard of. There is a coastguard station, and a beach. I believe it is easily accessible by a lane from the village, but I can't tell you any more, nor if there are caves, and I'm not a bit interested. Let's drive the other way to Mundesley, and walk up on to the cliff edge there. The road runs quite near, and it's only a two minutes' walk."

"Just as you like." She did not seem to mind. "As you say, we should see nothing tonight, and I'd like to stand again on these cliffs before I make my adieu."

They drove, therefore, as far as they could; then left the car and walked over the short green turf to the cliff edge, where they stood looking across the dark moving water far below. The moon was rising in a pale golden glow, and one by one objects came out of the darkness and grew into distinct shapes.

Alixe made out the tall coastguard signal station and walked towards it, where she stood gazing out in silence until a real sense of uneasiness crept over Dennis—some little presentiment, perhaps, of what was coming to them—to England—and to the world.

He spoke to her quite sharply: "Alixe! What on earth are you looking at? Come back to earth!"

She turned immediately with a laugh.

"Dreaming, that's all! Oh, but it's cold—I shiver. It must be the moonlight and my dreams. I love moonlight, don't you? If I had a lover I would always meet and walk with him by moonlight."

"Then I'm afraid the poor chap would have a damn slow time," retorted Dennis prosaically, "judging by the English weather. And why that 'if'? You must have had plenty of lovers—or would-be lovers."

"No." She shook her head. "Indeed, I have not. I am not, as you say, that sort; I am nearly as inexperienced as you, if what Cicely says of you is true."

"Which, of course, you know is not. Cicely knows nothing about me—it's pure imagination."

"But you are such old friends—you tell her everything!"

"Did she say that, too? How much more?"

"Oh, but yes. You have no secrets from Cicelee—you tell her all, just as when you were girl and boy. I wonder if you will marry Cicelee, Dennis."

"You need not wonder that—I shall not. I've already told you so. Cicely is nothing to me, and I wish you'd leave her alone and stop talking about her. I'm sick of even her name. What right had she to discuss me with you like this?"

"I'm afraid it was my fault." Alixe laughed lightly. "I ought not to have listened, but she was so serious and solemn, just like she used to be at school—just as if you really were her property. Come—I am cold. Let us go back to the car."

"You are cold," answered Dennis, "cold as that moonlight. And you always laugh. Have you ever been serious?"

"Yes, when I was young." She made a wry face. "All young people are, but as I grew older I knew it was no good to be serious, especially if you want adventures. You must laugh—laugh and dance!"

"And you never want anything else?"

"Ah—want! Yes, but one must go on wanting. There are many things I want, and one— Why do you say that —what should I want?"

"Love——"

"Oh, love! There are greater things in this world than love. No, I don't want that. Now, tell me, what do you want most of all in this world?"

"Just at this moment, to kiss you," answered Dennis swiftly, speaking from an uncontrollable impulse born of the moonlight and the summer night.

Alixe stood still and stared at him for a moment, then she broke into a little laugh, without appearing the least angry.

"You strange person! I thought it was agreed between us that we were to be friends—but that isn't included."

"Why not?" Dennis grew bolder, for now the car came in sight, and the minutes were numbered. "We should still be friends, shouldn't we?"

"Should we? I wonder how many girls you have kissed, Dennis. Cicelee was wrong—I knew it at the time. Now, confess, how many?"

"I've never counted. Isn't there a famous song, however, about: 'What are all these kissings worth, if thou

kiss not me?' I've never wanted to kiss anyone on earth as I do you."

"Well, then, if you feel like that, why don't you?"

Dennis hesitated. Why didn't he?

"I have offended you once today," he began, "and I don't want to be banished for ever. I said I wanted to—but if you'd hate me——"

"Oh, *mein Gott*!" Alixe relapsed into German and laughter. "Dennis, you are what you call a 'scream.' You are young and unspoiled, and I do not think I could hate you if I tried. Yes, kiss me, if you wish, but remember, the agreement holds, and it will change nothing. We must remain just friends."

He needed no second invitation, but swept her into his strong young arms, and sought her pretty lips with his.

. . . . .

No, he had never counted them: the pretty girls he had kissed at dances, parties, on the river, picnics; nor had he ever troubled himself about them. They had roused no deeper thoughts than a few minutes' pleasure, or a thrill. They liked to be kissed, too—even nice girls, as he had found out long ago. He was young, clean, and good-looking—and wasn't it natural?

So had he felt this evening, perhaps even this morning bathing with Alixe. He had just wanted to kiss her because she was so pretty and sweet.

But now, *now*, with sudden startling pain he realized that this was different to anything that had ever come into his life before: his eyes were opened as if by a flash of lightning, and he knew that he had hungered for this moment for days, perhaps for weeks.

He had kissed her with young lips, lightly and without passion. But now his hold upon her tightened, his face changed, and he tried to kiss her again hungrily, while, sensing the change, Alixe tried to evade him.

"No, one more!" he pleaded. "One more, Alixe! Yes, but I must, I must! Alixe! Darling—darling!"

Alixe tore herself out of his arms and faced him——

"Dennis, be quiet!" she ordered him. "I should not have let you do that. I'm sorry, it was my fault, but I thought you understood and were sensible. Come along now, please, and drive me back; that is, if you want our friendship to continue."

"Of course I do," muttered Dennis, following her, for already she was walking along towards the car.

"It is I who am sorry, and should apologize. Of course I'll drive you back at once. You'll—you'll let me come and see you in London again, won't you? Promise me you won't let this make any difference, Alixe!"

"Of course not, as long as you are sensible and keep to our compact." She reached the car. "I will sit behind, Dennis, and you must please drive me straight back to the hotel."

That was his punishment, thought Dennis. He had been a fool and dared to lose his head, and she was putting him back into his place.

But next time, he resolved, he wouldn't go back—he wouldn't!

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHITSUNTIDE fell late that year and the holiday, as usual, lasted all the week. From Norfolk, Dennis drove direct home to Longmead at his mother's command, and spent the following week-end beneath the family roof.

He was bored and out of temper all the time; he chafed at the delay and idleness, at the restrictions imposed upon him, and thought he had never before felt home so cramped, nor his mother so old-fashioned and autocratic.

He was longing to return to Town, to the peace and solitude of his flat, and to Alixe; although at the same time he actually dreaded meeting her again with all the nervousness of a young man's first love, wondering what she would be like, if she would still laugh, and what she would say.

Wondering, too, as he looked at his austere mother and his sisters, however he was going to bring about a meeting between them, and how they would, in his own language, "hit it off," and how possible or impossible it was that they and Alixe should have anything in common or become friends. And then thinking—always thinking—about Alixe here, in this house.

It rained all the week-end; the gardens were soaked, and the river deserted. He could not play golf, and motoring this weather was no pleasure; so he sat in his den when he was not dancing attendance upon his mother nor in church, and wrote letters (which would never be posted) to Alixe Gerard.

He was thus engaged on Sunday evening when Mrs. Armitage swept into the room.

Instantly, almost beneath her eyes, he put the letter into his blotting-book, and stood up in unfailing respect, saying:

"You want me, Mater?"

"To speak to you—yes. I have heard from Cicely that she and your uncle are coming up to London at the beginning of July—in about a fortnight. There is a church conference—I have been thinking that as Phyllis is going to stay with friends I will take Jean to London for a few days——"

"Splendid! I am sure Jean will enjoy it."

"I have some shopping to do, and you might get seats for the opera, or a good play—a suitable one, of course."

"Of course! Yes, certainly I will. Let me know when you are coming, and where will you stay? I know the Hardings usually stop at the 'Pendennis' in Bloomsbury, but couldn't you go somewhere a little more gay, for Jean's sake?"

"Certainly not. We shall stay with your uncle and Cicely at the 'Pendennis'—if it is good enough for them, it is good enough for us, and Jean is only seventeen and does not require gaiety. I had no gaiety nor any entertainment at her age, and she would be at school if it were not for this tiresome epidemic of mumps. Yes, the 'Pendennis' will do. And you will, of course, dine with us each evening."

Dennis's face fell. "If I can; I won't promise that."

"You can, and must. Cicely will expect that attention after all their hospitality to you. I have told you my plans quite early, so that there can be no possible excuse of a previous engagement for you."

"Yes, I see." He fidgeted with the blotting-pad, and wished she would go. Another plan had suddenly presented itself to his mind.

If his mother and Jean were coming to London he must make an opportunity for them to meet Alixe. He might ask Cicely to help—to invite Alixe to the hotel. Some-

thing must be arranged, and he was so busy thinking of it that he did not hear another word his mother said.

. . . . .

It was the middle of June when Dennis returned to his flat, but even then Alixe had not come back to London, and it was over a week afterwards before he caught a glimpse of her at the Karina Hotel.

Twice he had been to her flat but only to see Elizabeth, who gave him tea, and told him all about Brussels, and her work on the *Woman and the World* journal, but nothing about Alixe except that she was staying with friends in the country and would be back in a few days.

And then when he did see her she was not alone, for Otto Wertheim was waiting for her, and she could only spare a minute.

"I am so sorry!" she smiled at him. "Come to tea on Sunday—no, of course, you go home. Well, when you can, but not Monday because I dance here and I dine with Otto."

"Will you dine with me on Tuesday?"

"No, you can come to the flat."

"With Elizabeth as chaperon, and Otto in the background! How jolly!" growled Dennis. "I won't go home for Sunday—will you come out for the day, then?"

Alixe hesitated, and then shook her head.

"Really, Dennis, I can't. Otto Wertheim is in London until Tuesday, and it would be very unkind."

Dennis said: "Damn Otto!" and did not even apologize for swearing, adding: "And I'd like to chloroform Elizabeth. All right, I'll come to your flat on Sunday, and Otto and I will glare at one another for hours, and wonder which of us will persuade the other to go first—by telepathy, of course!"

"How stupid you are." Alixe laughed. "I do believe you are jealous of poor old Otto. Fancy anyone being

jealous of Otto! Why, he just—just manages my affairs for me, that's all."

Poor young dancers with one present engagement do not usually have "affairs" that want managing, thought Dennis, who every now and again remembered that he was a lawyer by profession, and used his wits accordingly. But he did not argue it, partly because it was simply impossible to believe that middle-aged, rather stout Otto Wertheim was anything but a business friend to the beautiful dainty Alixe, and partly because there was no time for argument.

"Are you dancing here next week?" he asked.

"Yes, until the end of July," answered Alixe. "Why?"

He told her that his mother and sister would be staying in Town next week, and he wanted Jean, who loved dancing, to see her. He would bring them to the "Karina" one afternoon, if she would be there.

"Yes, do!" said Alixe in her usual meaningless way. "Come on Friday—a week today—and I will arrange my dances so that I am free for tea from four-thirty to five. Will that please you? And Cicely will come too—she has not seen me dance, and said that she would like to."

"Yes, I'll bring Cicely, and Jean, and my mother, if she will come. I was going to ask you to come and meet them, but the 'Karina' is so jolly nice, it would be much better."

"Much," agreed the unsuspecting Alixe as she flitted away to join the waiting Otto.

That would be better, thought Dennis. He would arrange a meeting with Alixe at the "Karina," and afterwards a little private dinner somewhere. He was certain that once his mother had seen Alixe, and met her, she would be as charmed as the Hardings had been; and the dinner might take place at his flat, and be an opportunity to invite Alixe there. His heart glowed at the thought and the prospect, and it took the edge off

his disappointment that Alixe was dining with her "Otto," and not with him.

Sunday came, and he made his way to the flat which spelled Paradise for him—or might have done had it not been occupied by Elizabeth Piper, a woman friend, and Otto Wertheim.

"Come out for a drive," Dennis begged Alixe after tea. "It's light till quite late now, and we can get out of Town."

"It's going to rain," said Alixe from the depths of a cushiony chair, "and I'm tired."

"You won't be tired in the car—not half so tired as sitting here with all this chatter."

"Will you take us all?"

Dennis looked down. "No, just you and I. I want to talk to you. Alixe, you might come!"

She looked at him, and away again quickly, and frowned as if something suddenly hurt her. Elizabeth and her friend were chattering in German, and now Otto Wertheim joined in. How Dennis hated them all!

"Are you not going to give me even a few minutes alone?" he asked Alixe. "I haven't really seen you since we were in Norfolk, and I have so much to say to you."

She shook her head without answering, for what could she reply? Alixe was no inexperienced girl, and she knew quite well what it all meant, and where they were going. She liked Dennis as a boy, and had enjoyed their four months' friendship; but she knew perfectly well that that phase was over now, and Dennis the boy had gone. It was a man who sat here today in his place, with a hungry look and no conversation, with haunted eyes which followed her about. She had been through it before with other men, and neither liked nor wanted it. It even hurt her, because it forced her to remember the one time when she had suffered and cried and wished herself dead.

She did not want ever to cry again: she wanted to

laugh and dance; and this must be stopped before it was too late. She realized it now.

Looking up at Dennis, she caught Otto Wertheim's eyes upon her. They were light eyes and rather protruding, and they fixed her so that she uncurled herself and came out of her chair.

"Elizabeth, I thought you wanted to go to the Oratory——"

"Yes," answered Elizabeth. "Klara is just leaving, and I know Otto has an appointment at the German club. Will you come with me, or are you and Dennis going to stay here?"

Otto said something in guttural German. Dennis did not understand a word, but evidently it annoyed Alixe, for she turned on him like an angry kitten with its fur bristling, and its claws out; and with a laugh he got up to go.

There was a general round of good-bys, and *"Auf Wiedersehens,"* and Elizabeth went out of the door with them.

"Come with me, Alixe," begged Dennis again. "Let's dine somewhere quietly."

She shook her head, and did not answer, stroking the cat so that he could not see her face.

"Then may I stay here with you?"

"I'm going to the Oratory with Elizabeth."

"You needn't; you are only doing it to get rid of me. We've been here alone often enough, so it's not that, either."

"It does not look well for them all to go and leave us alone."

"You don't want me to stay, and you won't come out with me. Then I'd better go."

There was a second's silence. Otto Wertheim had left, but they could hear the faint voices of Elizabeth and her friends still talking on the landing.

"What have I done?" asked Dennis. "Is it my fault, or just that you like being cruel?"

"No, I don't like it." She rose to her feet and looked at him, and her voice was hard. "But sometimes it is necessary. You promised me to be friends, Dennis—only friends—and to be sensible. You understood. I told you——"

"I know, but you might give me a chance at least. I've my best—but——"

"You must do better, then." Suddenly she came and put her hands on his shoulders. "Laugh, Dennis, laugh!" she ordered him with a smile which in itself was as sad as tears. "I will meet you on Friday, and we will both laugh and dance—yes? I will tell the orchestra to play the Tango we love: *'En Tus Brazos,'* and we will dance it together for Cicelee and your sister to see. And perhaps—for by then Otto will have gone home—I will dine with you one evening if you promise to be good."

She smiled on at him. By Friday she would be prepared for the hour which she knew she could not hold off much longer. She would be hard and cold. But today she felt only sad. He did not know it, but Otto Wertheim had brought her disquieting news, and she felt that she could not bear any more at the moment.

Dennis turned his head and kissed the hand so near his lips. He could not laugh, and had nothing to answer, for he dare not say what he wished to.

After a minute he turned to the door.

"Then, good-by till Friday. I'll see you then, and I shall keep you to your promise."

CHAPTER NINE

FOR lack of anything better to do Dennis spent the following evening at the hospital with Jack Eden, and told him in the course of conversation that his mother and sister were coming to Town for a few days. They would arrive on Wednesday, and he proposed taking Jean to the "Karina" on Friday afternoon to see Alixe Gerard dance.

"Splendid!" declared Jack Eden. "I'll come along, too. Pretty little girl, that sister of yours, Dennis; I'd like to meet her again."

"Why, Jean is only a kid," laughed Dennis. "She's still at school, but I dare say she will appreciate your attention. You admired her before, didn't you?"

The elder man nodded. "Your mother won't come, will she?"

"I hope not. I'm going to suggest taking Jean and my cousin, Miss Harding, and leaving the Mater with my uncle. But one can never tell what she will do."

"You must manage that—Jean won't mind. We have exchanged a few post cards, and she'll like a dance with me, I know. So that will leave you free to dance with our pretty Alixe Gerard."

"Possibly." Dennis looked embarrassed. "Only my cousin, Miss Harding, will be there also."

"That needn't prevent Jean and me having a dance together, anyhow; and can't you keep your mother away? You would be wise: she won't like the 'Karina,' nor Miss Gerard."

Tempted to retort that it was no business of his, Dennis reflected that Jack Eden was right. His mother must not

be invited to accompany Jean and Cicely, and a meeting between her and Alixe must be arranged as he originally intended: either at the Pendennis Hotel, if by the remotest chance he could persuade Alixe to come and dine there, or at his flat. She had said she would dine with him, so why not keep her to her word and arrange the dinner there for, say, Saturday night?

"Still keen on Miss Gerard?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," replied Dennis shortly.

"Bit of a mystery, isn't she? You don't know much about her, do you, even now?"

"Quite sufficient. As I've told you, my cousin knew her in Germany several years ago—they were at the same school."

"In Germany, yes, I suppose so. Been to her flat lately?"

"I was there yesterday. Anything more you'd like to know?"

Jack Eden laughed. "No, that will do for the moment. Take a word of advice? Or is it useless to offer it?"

"Quite useless, thanks, and quite unnecessary."

"You mean—too late?"

"I mean what I said. You can come to my party on Friday at the 'Karina,' if you like. I dare say Alixe will be pleased to see you again, and I'll tell Jean, and keep it quiet from the Mater."

Jack Eden's eyebrows shot up at the "Alixe," exactly as Dennis expected they would, but he did not remark upon it. Only:

"We will keep it quiet, I think," he said.

. . . . .

Cicely was filled with doubts and misgivings.

She accepted Dennis's invitation to the "Karina" because she wished to see Alixe dance, which she understood was the reason they were going; and she doubtfully acceded to her cousin's request to say as little as possible to her aunt

about Miss Gerard; but she now felt that she had been deceitful about it, and that she ought to have told Mrs. Armitage.

Also, matters assumed a much more serious aspect when they were joined at the entrance to the hotel by another man whom she could not recollect ever having met before, either with Dennis or at Longmead; but who obviously knew and admired Jean very much.

The ballroom at the "Karina" was well filled; the dancing had begun when they reached the table Jack Eden had appropriated, and Alixe was there in a very diaphanous dress of periwinkle blue not very much below her knees, and decidedly low in the neck. She wore a long chain of blue beads, and blue ear-rings—and her hair looked like gold.

And Cicely was shocked at her appearance, because people did not dress like that in the afternoon in Norfolk; and she did not think, after all, it was quite the sort of place her aunt would approve for Jean. Nearly all the visitors seemed to be foreigners—their dresses were startling, and sometimes their behavior too!

Jean, however, was loving it. She was talking to Jack Eden as if she had known him all her life; her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright; and before she had finished her tea she had disappeared into the sea of dancers, to Cicely's dismay.

"Did your mother know that Jean was going to dance?" she asked Dennis presently, when Alixe had gone to give a lesson. "I understood we were coming here to see Alixe, as I told Aunt Augusta; but I didn't understand it was a sort of tea-party, nor that we were going to meet another man. Does your mother know him, Dennis?"

"She does," replied Dennis briefly.

"I haven't met him before, have I? Not at your house?"

"Haven't you? The Mater doesn't like him, you see."

"Oh—not approve, perhaps."

"Perhaps not. But I like him, and so does Jean."

"She ought not to meet and dance with a man whom your mother doesn't like nor approve, Dennis; and you shouldn't have brought her, or him. I'm not at all sure, indeed, that Aunt Augusta would care about Alixe—she looks so foreign today in that low dress. And she is only a professional dancer."

"Only?" repeated Dennis ominously. "What's wrong with dancing as a profession? Or with Alixe? The Mater will jolly well have to learn to approve. And she can't shut Jean up for ever—it's not fair. Oh, come along, Cicely—come and dance."

"No, thank you—not here; and I don't do these dances. I waltz, of course, but I would not care about doing that here. You had better ask Alixe—she is accustomed to it."

"I have every intention of doing so," retorted Dennis; for Cicely's superior attitude annoyed him; and when Alixe returned, he immediately took her away to dance, leaving his cousin alone.

. . . . .

Curiosity, and a little suspicion, took Mrs. Armitage to the "Karina" that evening at a quarter to six. She had had her tea, and her brother had gone to attend a diocesan meeting; and suddenly she decided to take a taxi-cab and fetch her children.

She was sure Dennis would forget to come away, and she liked to dine at seven. She was sure also that Jean would be safer under her care; and she wondered exactly who and what this dancer was, whom they had, according to Cicely, gone to see.

Now, Mrs. Armitage was an old-fashioned lady. She wore a dark dress almost trailing on the ground, and a real bonnet with an osprey in it, and strings of wide ribbon which tied beneath her chin. It was not an unfashionable dress for an elderly lady of 1914—her coat of pale gray silk was quite in order, and her kid gloves were perfection

—nevertheless, it looked slightly out of place at one of the first *thé dansant* restaurants London had known.

She followed a page downstairs into the ballroom lounge, and there, on the threshold, they paused, for an exhibition dance was evidently in progress. The room was clear except for one couple—a young dancer in a ridiculously short skirt, wearing a Spanish shawl of scarlet and black, a high comb which held a scarlet peony, and a large red fan; and a young man in a dark-blue suit who was dancing the Tango with her, and gazing into her eyes.

Mrs. Armitage stared and gasped as she recognized her son—and from him she looked round until she found Jean, hatless and untidy, talking over a table to that dreadful Dr. Eden; while across the room, alone, sat Cicely.

It was well she had come, thought Mrs. Armitage grimly; and she walked on unheeding the page (who had paused until the dance was ended) until she reached Cicely's side.

"What does this mean, Cicely?" she demanded.

. . . . .

The dance came to an end; and with the utmost reluctance Dennis released his partner—turned towards the table where his conscience reminded him that he had left his cousin alone, and saw his mother.

He stood still in utter dismay.

"Oh, good God!" he exclaimed. "Here's the Mater! Just like her to turn up unexpectedly. Now where the dickens is Jean—I can't see her anywhere."

"Your mother?" Alixe's eyebrows went up. "Did you expect her?"

"No—but one never knows what my mother will do. I expect she has come for Jean; and she loathes Jack Eden. I must go and protect Jean—do come with me, please."

Alixe shook her head. "No—I would rather not; and she will not like me, Dennis."

"Of course she will! Look how the Hardings loved you. Please let me introduce you—be a good sport!"

Alixe shook her head again. Then she looked long at Mrs. Armitage across the room—long and thoughtfully; and for a minute neither spoke, till Dennis saw Jean appear, very flushed and untidy, clinging to Jack Eden's arm.

"Oh, I must go and protect Jean," he said again. "Won't you come? Please do—I can't desert the poor kid."

Then Alixe laughed gaily. "Of course I'll come!" she cried. "Introduce me to your mother, Dennis—anything you like. Come along!" And without waiting for him to reply she started across the room, her shawl trailing behind and her comb awry.

They found the party seated at the table—Mrs. Armitage questioning Jean sharply like a child, and giving Jack Eden a frigid bow. Alixe received another, and retaliated by dropping into a chair, and imploring "somebody" to give her a cigarette, which Jack Eden lighted for her.

There was too much powder on her face, and her hair was untidy and loose; her dress was slipping half off one shoulder, and when she sat down she showed a blue silk leg nearly to her knee.

But now Cicely was at ease, and self-satisfied, for she knew what effect Alixe would have upon Mrs. Armitage, and thought that, after all, it was a good thing Dennis had brought them all here, so that he could see for himself how impossible she was in comparison to his own people before he went any further.

Certainly she was a contrast to Cicely in her neat tailor-made suit, her black hat with a feather, her umbrella, and her black laced-up shoes.

It was a very uncomfortable few minutes for everybody. Nothing, Dennis thought, could have happened more inopportunely or disastrously; and Alixe was at her worst. That is, she was at her most foreign and daring—as if she

was playing the "little devil" on purpose to shock his mother, and make things difficult for him. Inwardly, he fumed and cursed; but it had no effect upon either her or Jack Eden, who was behaving almost as badly.

Alixe was the first to move. "I must go," she announced. "Elizabeth is out, and I must put the kitten to bed. No—I don't want a taxi; and I don't want you, Dr. Eden. I shall walk through St. James's Park and get a bus."

"We, too, must go," said Mrs. Armitage. "Get your coat, Jean, and you, Cicely. The taxi-cab is waiting—Dennis, are you ready?" She gave Alixe and Jack Eden the stiffest of bows, and prepared to go.

"I'll see you into your taxi," said Dennis. "But I'm not coming with you now—I've another engagement."

"Another engagement! Impossible! You are dining with us at our hotel."

"Not this evening," firmly. "I'm sorry—I can't."

"But you can have made no engagement for this week—I told you we should expect you every evening."

"Nevertheless—I have; and I'm not coming."

Afterwards, he wondered at his temerity, defying his mother like this almost for the first time in his life; but the sight of Alixe standing watching them gave him courage, and he did not care what came afterwards. He wasn't going back to the "Pendennis" in that taxi-cab—he was going home with Alixe to her flat.

She moved away, followed by Jack Eden, who had been vainly trying for some minutes to get a word with Jean.

"Oh—poor Dennis!" she remarked, half-laughing. "She treats him like a little boy! I had no idea he had such a severe parent."

"He's a fool to stand it," answered Eden. "He's his own master, and the money he spends is his own. I'm sorrier for Jean—she has absolutely no chance—for Dennis can cut loose if he likes. I wonder whether he will dare to leave them—for I suppose his engagement is with you."

"The first I've heard of it." Alixe looked back. "He had better go home with the family, I think, or there will be a row. I will walk along, Dr. Eden—please don't come."

But Dennis did dare. He said quite firmly and finally: "I'm sorry—I can't come this evening, and I'm not going to. And since it's no use arguing, I'm going now—I want to catch Miss Gerard before she leaves the hotel."

So that he did not even see them into the taxi, but almost bolted through the hall, and caught Alixe up a few yards down the street.

"For God's sake let's get away!" he exclaimed. "What an afternoon—and we were just enjoying ourselves."

"You won't make matters better, then, by coming with me," answered Alixe. "Your mother won't like it any more than she liked me—which wasn't much!"

"You weren't exactly—well, at your best. You did your utmost to shock her and Cicely today, and were quite different to what you were at Elverstrand. Isn't that so?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, Dennis—you shouldn't have introduced me. I didn't want you to." She paused in her walk. "And please go back—don't come with me."

"But I am—I don't care whether my mother likes it or not. I am not a boy to be told where I am to go—when, and with whom; and I do what I please. Shall we taxi? I haven't my car, because I took the girls to the 'Karina,' and they are nervous of my driving in the London traffic."

"No—I'm going to walk. I'll go through the Park, and get a bus in Westminster. I like the fresh air after the 'Karina'."

"All right—then I'll walk with you. Are you going to dine with me, as you said you would?"

"Did I say I would? But I didn't mean this evening, did I? I said 'one evening.' Tonight you had better go and make your peace with your family. When are they going home?"

"They are driving down on Monday. I wanted you to

come and dine, perhaps tomorrow night, at my flat—all of you, you know——" He hesitated, for he knew perfectly well that it was impossible, even as he spoke. Alixe would not come, and if she did his mother would not accept her as a guest. He wondered why she had played such a trick on him; and as if she read his thoughts she said:

"No, Dennis, thank you. I will not come. I will dine with you one night, if you wish, but not with your mother."

It was a warm, golden summer evening, early in July, and the Park was green and pleasant. They walked down a shady path till the roar of the traffic in Piccadilly grew faint, and they had it almost to themselves; but they did not talk, because there was nothing to say at the moment which could be said.

Then: "Let's sit down for a few minutes," suggested Dennis. "There's no hurry; and you need not say Elizabeth will wonder where you are, for you have already informed me that she is out. Sit down and tell me why you behaved as you did this afternoon. I wanted my mother to like you, as the Hardings did."

Alixe shrugged her shoulders and did not answer. She hesitated, too, about sitting down, but gave in to him after a moment—although she would have preferred to walk on and get across the Park to the bus as quickly as possible.

To make matters worse, when they sat down conversation came to a blank stop, and even she could think of nothing to talk about. She tried, but receiving only monosyllabic replies, relapsed herself into a silence which was embarrassing and nerve-racking.

Dennis took off his hat, and put it on the seat beside him, and then he began poking holes in the gravel with his stick.

Alixe could bear it no longer. "In another minute I shall scream!" she said. "Stop fidgeting, or let us walk on."

He looked up, dropped his stick, and caught her hands.

"Alixe! I love you more than anything on earth," he exclaimed. "Will you marry me—and when?"

She gave a little sigh, and shook her head. She did not feign surprise, nor did she withdraw her hands. It might embarrass him, but she was foreign enough not to care who saw them.

"Now, why did you say that!" she murmured plaintively, "I've done my best to stop you—couldn't you see? Haven't I done everything, even to shocking your mother? And still you say it! Besides, Dennis dear, you promised to be just friends. Then do not let us be serious, but just go on being friends, please."

"I can't do it." He looked into her eyes. "I love you too much. And it was all rot about 'being friends,' as you know. I've been in love with you since the day I first saw you—I've always wanted to marry you." He broke off, and waited for her to speak; but she sat very still, looking away now; and after a moment or two he went on quickly and urgently, for now the ice was broken he wanted to tell her all about it.

"Alixe—you will, won't you? I want you so much. Say 'yes' quickly—don't keep me in suspense. I don't expect you to love me as I love you—you couldn't, of course; but I'll do anything in the world for you if only you'll be my wife."

Alixe drew her hands from his then, and turned and faced him, her eyes clear and straight.

"I can't possibly marry you, Dennis—it's absolutely out of the question—and I am very sorry you have spoiled our nice friendship by asking me. Please take it back, and let us both forget it was ever said."

"Oh, but you can't mean that!" He did not take her seriously. "And how on earth can I take it back—it's said, and I mean it. Why not?"

"I tell you it is impossible. Just consider for a moment" —she tried to laugh it off. "Your mother! How do you think she would like me for a daughter-in-law? It would

not do at all. Elizabeth and I are—are Bohemians. We have no home or family, as you know; like your kind of people have. Yours is a different world to ours, and it wouldn't do at all."

"Then I'll come into yours," steadily. "I don't care an atom about family or home, or anything on earth except you, Alixe." He put his hand over hers, holding it tight. "You're not going to turn me down and say you won't have me—are you? You can't!"

"Dennis—I must; and you will have to understand that I mean it, and never ask me again."

"But why? You must give me a reason. You don't like me—is that it?"

"You are a dear, and I do like you. I don't believe anyone could help liking you. But——"

"But not enough to marry me? I'd be awfully good to you, and you might care a bit in time. Haven't you ever thought about it, Alixe? Have you just looked on me as a pal all this time, and nothing more?"

"It was understood between us, wasn't it?"

"Yes—I didn't know myself until I kissed you that night at Mundesley that it wasn't only friendship on my part. I expect you think I'm a fool, but honestly I didn't know what my feelings for you were. But—that night—didn't you care a bit for me then?"

Alixe was a born actress, as well as one by profession; and here and now was her opportunity. She had only to laugh and tell him "not to be silly and sentimental," that she had meant nothing that night at Mundesley—had been merely playing, and cared nothing whatever for him—and if she did, there would be a quick finish to this romance.

She knew Dennis Armitage better than he guessed; that he was too young and sensitive, and too seriously in love, to stand either laughter, or even a hint of ridicule.

But she did not do it. She did not even smile.

"I'm sorry, Dennis," she said again in the same quiet,

final tone. "I cannot—ever—marry you. Please do not say any more."

There was silence between them, and in the pause he took his hand from hers and sat upright and away. When she ventured to look at him she saw how white he had gone, and it hurt her incredibly.

"Oh, Dennis—you'll get over it!" she cried, trying to smile. "You are young, and you'll soon forget."

"You talk as if I were a schoolboy. I am at least four years older than you; and I shall not forget."

"I am twenty years older in experience—and you will! Men always get over their first loves. I am your first, am I not, Dennis? Cicely was right?"

"Yes—I'm not ashamed of that. But you'll be my last, too. However—" he squared his shoulders—"I'm sorry I've worried you. I won't say any more today; only—perhaps you'll tell me this—are you already married?"

"Married?" in surprise. "*Herr Gott*—no! Why should I be married—and to whom?"

"I don't know, but Cicely said once that she had heard you were."

"No—it is not true."

"Is there another man? Is that why?"

Alixe hesitated. It was barely a second, but just perceptible, and he followed up his question swiftly.

"Is it that German brute—Wertheim?"

"Certainly not. Otto is, as I have told you many times, only a business friend." She rose to her feet as she spoke, resolutely. "Come—let us walk on; and at the gates, Dennis, I will get a bus. And please do not come with me—I will not dine with you this evening."

He rose and followed her.

"May I come and see you as usual?"

"You had much better not. You must take my answer as final, Dennis—and be sensible, do you hear?"

"I hear, and I'll be sensible—but I will not take your answer as final," answered Dennis doggedly. "I am going

to marry you, Alixe, as long as you are not married to any other man, if I have to fight for you to the death."

This time Alixe managed to laugh faintly. "You'll make a lovely knight in armor," she said, with something of her old teasing ways. "Much better than a pretty curate. All right, Dennis dear, fight for me! Be my knight. But you must be friends first."

"I'll remember that. And if it takes me twenty years, fighting all the time, I'll marry you in the end."

"Meanwhile—here comes a bus," answered Alixe. "Adieu——"

CHAPTER TEN

EXACTLY as Dennis anticipated, there was trouble awaiting him on his next visit to Longmead.

"Of course," declared his icily displeased mother, interviewing him alone, "I can understand that, to a young man like yourself, this dancing person is fascinating; but you ought not to have taken your sister to meet her—nor to meet Dr. Eden, of whom you know I do not approve. I consider him fast, and an undesirable acquaintance for Jean. And most certainly you ought not to have forgotten yourself in the unpardonable way you did, and followed that young woman instead of accompanying us back to our hotel."

Dennis shrugged his shoulders. He wished she would be quick and get it over, so that he could smoke and be alone.

"I did not, as you express it, forget myself at all," he answered. "I had an engagement with Miss Gerard, and I never agreed to spend every evening with you. I've surely a perfect right at my age to please myself."

"Not when it is rude, and a slight upon your mother and cousin. What Cicely must have though of it I cannot imagine—your taking her to such an entertainment."

"It's a topping entertainment—what's wrong with it?"

"And that person in her low dress—with her legs, and her powdered face——"

"She'd look funny without legs—she couldn't dance! What's wrong with her? She's a friend of Cicely's."

"I've heard all about that." Mrs. Armitage held up her hand. "Not a friend—a mere school acquaintance at

that strange, mixed German pension to which, against my advice, my sister-in-law sent Cicely. And I understand that this person followed you to Elverstrand at Whitsuntide, and almost forced your uncle to invite her with you to the Rectory. A strange proceeding, indeed!"

"The first I've heard of it," said Dennis, staring. "But it's not worth arguing about. I expect Cicely felt like telling that tale to get even with us. Well—what next?"

"I deplore Cicely's acquaintance," continued his mother. "But even more—for a man—do I deplore yours with such a person."

"Such a person?" repeated Dennis ominously—but his mother took no notice of his interruption.

"It is this type of woman, Dennis, who entangle young men like yourself—rich young men; and then sue them for breach of promise of marriage."

This time Dennis smiled, as if something amused him.

"Well—that certainly won't be necessary," he replied calmly. "Oh, no—she won't do that, I'll promise you."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mrs. Armitage.

"Pretty obvious, isn't it?" He looked straight at her. "I have already asked Miss Gerard to honor me by becoming my wife—and she has refused me. I hope, however, that in time I may persuade her to change her mind."

Mrs. Armitage sank on to the nearest chair, and put her handkerchief to her face to hide her agitation.

"Oh, Dennis!" she moaned. "How could you do such a thing! You—my only son, and a professional dancer! A young woman of whom you know nothing——"

"Neither do you," pointed out Dennis. "You certainly know nothing against her, and neither does anyone else. And anyway—there it is! You may as well know."

"It is impossible! Absolutely impossible! I want you to marry—but not such a person. Why not Cicely?"

Dennis had long known his mother's wishes in this direction, but it was startling to be suddenly faced with them, and he required time to think before answering.

"Cicely," she repeated firmly. "A charming girl. Sweet-tempered, accomplished, good-looking, domesticated, musical, and fond of children."

"Sounds like an advertisement about a 'Mother's Help'," murmured Dennis, disrespectfully. "And aren't you getting on rather fast when you talk about the children? You ought to get us married first, you know—it sounds immoral! Oh, well—anything else? I dare say dear Cicely is all these things, but she is also older than I am, and I don't in the least want to marry her."

"I have long wished this marriage between you, as you must have known."

"Now you speak of it, I did. But I'm sorry—I can't help you, over it. There is only one girl on earth at the present moment whom I have the slightest desire to marry; and if I can't have her, I'll go without."

"Have you no thought for Cicely herself, then? You are not children now—and think how frequently you visit the Hardings, and how devoted she is to you! Cicely cares very much for you, Dennis—obviously."

"Oh, nonsense, Mater—I don't believe it." Dennis laughed, although he flushed with embarrassment.

"It's quite true. I know it; and everyone who knows you expects you and Cicely to marry, eventually."

"Then they can expect something else," shortly, "for I have no intention of doing it. And it's not the slightest use our discussing it."

"Very well." Mrs. Armitage rose, and walked to the door. "For tonight the matter is closed, but I trust to your sense of duty and reason not to do anything further in the matter without telling me. You understand, however, that should you persist in your intention, and marry this young woman, I shall not receive her, nor shall I allow your sisters to visit you."

Dennis stepped forward and opened the door for her.

"Allow me," he said with exaggerated politeness. "Good night, Mater. And on my part, may I say that I will not discuss this subject again. And if you insist upon it—then I shall not come home at all."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AT the end of July, Alixe Gerard disappeared suddenly from London, and all Dennis's inquires elicited no information as to her whereabouts. So that after hanging about aimlessly for a week with nothing to do, he joined his family in Devonshire for the month of August.

He was there on the Fourth—that never to be forgotten day when the whole of Europe stood still and waited to see what was going to happen; when the drums of war began to play, and the conflagration of the world began.

As soon as he could, Dennis rushed back to London, for his first insistent thoughts were of Alixe, and what had or would become of her if by chance she really was of German or Austrian nationality.

Already hard tales were beginning to be told of "spies" in our midst; of "alien enemies," internment camps, deportations, and so on; and he had heard nothing of her now for three weeks.

He had only seen her once since that evening when they had parted outside the Park gates, and then not alone. And he had no idea what had become of her.

It was a changed London, and a changed country, as Dennis found when he returned to his flat.

People spoke of the mysterious disappearance of troops from all over the country, and Aldershot was empty. Sentries grew up like young trees along the railway lines; huge Army Service Corps camps sprang up everywhere; strange maneuvers took place in public parks; and

presently the territorials and recruits for the new army began to march through London and the country singing:

"It's a long, long way to Tipperary——"

Everywhere were Belgian refugees, flags, and khaki. War fever had come at last to England; and London throbbed to drums and thrilled to searchlights. It was one grand pageant, that August and September, with very little thought of how far it was going, or how long it would last.

No one knew where the troops had gone, nor what was happening to them "over there." It was a glorious opportunity to smash the Germans—that was all.

Dennis Armitage's first thought and desire should have been to join up; but like many thousand young men of that day, without any question of shirking his duty he did not think it would be necessary for men such as he to go.

He was an only son, and his mother a widow; and "of course, it will be over in a few weeks," he said like everybody else. "And we shall have plenty of men without me going. Why—they are crowding to the Colors; and Kitchener only asks for a hundred thousand immediately!"

And frankly, just then he did not want to join. All his heart was in London with the girl he loved; and every day instead of (as she had wisely counseled him) trying to forget, and go back to friendship—the thing grew worse, until it was only that that mattered in life.

She was still away, and he had not the remotest idea where, when September came to a close; and now Dennis began to wonder if, after all, he should not follow Jack Eden's example, and apply for a commission in the Army Medical Corps.

It would be dull in Town with so many of his friends gone—he would miss "old Jack," who could talk of nothing else, and was enthusiastically bidding all his friends to come out with him and face the Huns.

"You have nothing to keep you at home," he said to Dennis one evening in his rooms at the hospital. "You're not married—why don't you join?"

He was in high spirits, for he had received his call, and was to go in a fortnight; but Dennis shook his head.

"I must wait a bit—and I'd like to get married before I go; make sure of it."

Jack Eden stared at him blankly for a few seconds.

"You mean Alixe Gerard, of course. I knew you were going that way. But it won't do, Dennis, old chap. It won't do!"

"Won't it—why not? What is the matter with her? And anyhow, I'm going to marry her—if she will have me."

"She won't—I'd like to bet on that. And I have nothing against the pretty Miss Gerard. Probably she is as well born and bred as yourself, even if she is a professional dancer. But if I am not much mistaken, she is also—an alien enemy; Austrian or German. And if this is so, you can hardly contemplate marrying her just at this time, can you?"

"But she is not. She has told me herself that her father is British, and I would take her word for it."

"Perhaps. Anyhow, Dennis, if I were you, I'd wait a bit, and do nothing in a hurry. We shall soon know which are the Germans in this country."

"As I have not the remotest idea where Alixe is at the moment I can do nothing else but wait." Dennis tried to laugh and make light of it; but it was plain to the elder man that it was far beyond a laughing matter for him.

"And I don't mind admitting," he added, "that I'm no end worried, wondering where she is. I believe she is at least partly English, but no one knows what may have happened; and it's over two months now since I have seen her."

"Yes—and I wonder where she has disappeared to, and whether you will ever see her again," thoughtfully. "She

was always a mystery, you know—Alixe Gerard never danced for a living. I know she used to taxi to the theater, and to the 'Karina' and back; and she wore a coat last winter worth no end, and pearls which were not imitation. Then there was always that German fellow, Otto Something-or-other, hanging about in the background. I hated the look of that man."

"Not half as much as I did," returned Dennis. "He was German, I know, and I hope to God they've deported him. But Alixe——"

"Are you supposed to be engaged to her?"

"No such luck—she refused to even think of it. But she may change her mind now, if she finds things difficult. I don't suppose they will continue the dances at the 'Karina'—the papers say they are going to close all the restaurants and cafés early, and serve no drinks after ten o'clock, so it will be no use keeping them open. And if all the men are joining up, as they appear to be doing, there will be nobody to dance."

"You'll have to come too," repeated Jack Eden again. "You'd easily get a commission, and it's just young men like you they will need."

"I expect I shall, eventually," answered Dennis. But his thoughts were still far away.

With Alixe still his central problem, he walked into the "Karina" the following day, as he had regularly done for the last three or four weeks, once or twice a week, hoping to see her, or hear something of her—knowing this was a favorite rendezvous for foreigners, and the most likely spot for news.

The tea-dances had been discontinued at the end of July, for the holiday season, and were not likely now to be recommenced; but he sat at one of the little tables in the lounge for half an hour, and at the end of this time his long patience was rewarded by the sight of Alixe talking to the manager of the hotel—a German, as he knew.

Unhesitating, he walked across to her, holding out his hand.

"I had almost given up hope of ever seeing you again," he exclaimed.

"Oh, Dennis!" She seemed pleased and relieved to see him. "I am glad to meet you—but why are you here? There is no more *thé dansant*—nothing! I dance no more."

"I came to look for you," he said. "I've been here several times, hoping you'd come. I've been to your flat too, but, of course, it was closed. Come and sit down, and let us have some tea. I've a thousand things to say."

"No—" She nodded good day to the bland and smiling manager, and moved away with him. "Do not let us stay here—I do not like it any more. It is too foreign. You can come back with me to my flat if you like; and we will have tea there. Would you like?"

"Would I? Of course I would! And I've got my car here. I'm so delighted to see you, Alixe, I could throw my hat in the air, and hug you with everybody looking on. Oh—I won't; you needn't look alarmed. But I've been so frightfully worried—wondering where you were and what could have happened to you."

He put his hand on her arm and she did not seem to mind. Together they passed through the lounge and hall.

"The last time we were here, my mother turned up—do you remember? And do you know that I have only seen you once since then! Where have you been?"

"I went to Scarborough and Whitby for August. Since then I have been in the country. No—the 'Karina' is very foreign, is it not?"—as they crossed the pavement to his car. "The manager calls himself a Pole, but——" She shrugged her shoulders. "A hateful man!"

"You didn't seem to be finding him very hateful when I came up." Dennis started the car, and they drove away. "What were you doing there, if the dances are discontinued?"

"Nothing," answered Alixe flatly, and immediately began to talk about the War—England and Germany. Had Dennis got a commission yet—when was he going? Oh, but of course he was going!

She kept up the conversation all the way to her flat, talked lightly, quickly—almost excitedly. It struck Dennis that she had changed, though in what way he could not have said. She seemed older, nervous—and her gay spirits were obviously superficial.

They came to the quiet street where her flat was, and she preceded him upstairs, and let them both in with her key. It was quiet and dark, and she switched on the light in the pretty sitting-room, and said: "Come in and make yourself at home. I will get some tea—as you see, I am here alone."

"What—has Miss Piper gone?"

"Elizabeth went at the beginning of August, just after war was declared. She was German, you know—her name was really Pfeiffer; and, of course, she had to go with the rest. I—was sorry. We have lived together and been friends since first I came to England."

"And what has happened to your friend Otto?" asked Dennis, following her into the tiny kitchen.

Alixe lit the gas-ring and put on the kettle.

"I don't know," she answered. "I have lost him also. Probably he, too—has returned. I don't know. And I—" she shrugged her shoulders with a pretty foreign gesture—"I am terribly under suspicion! I could not get anyone to work for me if I tried to; neither could I get anything to do."

"But if you also are German," said Dennis quietly, "how is it that you, too, have not been sent back? Or do you have to register as an alien?"

"No—I do not register; and why should I go back? Germany is not my country—I have told you so. My father is as English as you are. But do not talk of me—tell me of yourself, Dennis. Are you going to join the

Army? I thought you would have been one of the first to go."

Over tea, Dennis tried to explain to her that he wanted to join but his mother would not hear of it.

"I am an only son, you see—and she is a widow."

"There must be many only sons," said Alixe. "But they cannot all remain at home because of that. If I had been a man, I should have rushed to join. But you will go?"

"Probably—if it is necessary." He wanted to talk about themselves—not the War. "But it isn't necessary at present; they have plenty of men."

"Not necessary! Plenty of men! Oh—you English!" Alixe threw up her hands in despair. "Will you never wake up? The Germans have a fighting army of millions; and they are even now marching through France, Belgium, ready to invade England. And you sit drinking tea, and saying: 'Really, it is not necessary, at present—they have plenty of men!' I believe you will still be saying that when the German Army is marching into London!"

Dennis stared at her in unhidden astonishment.

"I'm afraid not," he answered dryly. "To begin with, they will never march into London. We're slow people, and we bungle things; but we generally manage to get there. And, by Jove, Alixe! I do believe you are British now, if I doubted it before. If you hadn't been you wouldn't have spoken like that—would you?"

"You did doubt it then?" She set down her cup and looked at him queerly. "But I told you so."

"I wanted to believe you, too. But your mother was German, wasn't she? Didn't you tell me that?"

"Yes—her name was Cora Helm. And she was a dancer from Berlin."

"Gerard is your father's name?"

Alixe poured out some cream for the cat, and bent down to set the saucer on the floor, so that he could not see her face.

"Gerard is my professional name. My father is a country gentleman—he is married again and there are children. He would not like me to use his name—as a dancer. It is not, you see, as if I were at the top of my profession as my mother was—I am nobody——"

There were a few minutes' silence, for it seemed to Dennis then as if suddenly he understood the whole story. And he grew hot, and cursed himself inwardly for having been so dense as not to guess it before, and so save her the shame of having almost to tell him. Her father was an English country gentleman, and her mother a pretty German dancer. (He knew she was pretty—prettier than Alixe; for he had seen her portrait.) And now the father was married, and had other children——

After all, what did it matter if he had never married Alixe's mother? Alixe was all the same—and he loved her.

Only—in that case, of course, she was not legally a British subject at all, and it might be discovered.

"I say, Alixe—you'd better marry me! I wish you would," he burst out. "That would settle your nationality once and for all; because a woman takes her husband's nationality, as of course you know. Why won't you? Then you needn't bother any more about looking for another engagement—I'll look after you."

"I'm not going to look for another." She took no notice of his outburst. "I don't need to, for I was not dependent on my dancing. I have a little money, enough to live on, from my father; and I shall stay here for the present and do war work, if I can get some."

"You don't care a bit about me," muttered Dennis.

"Yes—I care that you will not be a soldier," she laughed. "That you think of me, and marriage, when all you should have in your mind is your country and your King, and to go to the War! You said you would be my knight, Dennis—do you remember? Then you must join the Army, at once."

"Very anxious to get me killed and out of the way!" retorted Dennis, laughing, but piqued. "All right—here's a bargain. You say you will marry me, and I'll apply for a commission this very day. And we'll be married before I go to France. Now, how's that?"

"Of course not—I could not even consider such a thing." And she backed away as he came across to her as if he would take her in his arms. "Why, have you forgotten your mother and what she would say—especially now? No, no, Dennis—now the War has come I would not marry you, even if there were no other reason against it. This war—my German blood—would stand between us. No, Dennis—no!"

"Why not? My people don't matter—we need never see them. And why shouldn't I marry as I choose? I'm my own master, and it's my own life."

"You are young, Dennis; and you would be sorry."

"I should never be sorry; neither would I let you be. And—don't treat me as a boy, Alixe. I'm not—I'm a man, and I love you more every day. Be kind to me——"

"That would not be kindness. No, Dennis—no!"

There was a ring at the door-bell.

"Who on earth is that?" asked Dennis impatiently.

"I don't know." Alixe looked uneasy. "I can't imagine who would come. Stay here, Dennis, while I go and see, for I am alone, and it would not look well for you to be seen here."

She went into the hall, closing the sitting-room door after her, before she opened the outer one.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A MAN stood outside the door on the landing. He was wearing a dark overcoat and held a soft hat in his hand.

Alixe stared at him with dilated eyes, as if she were looking at a ghost—every bit of color drained from her face.

"You!" she exclaimed, scarcely above a whisper, and giving him no name. "I did not know—oh, where have you come from—and why?"

"May I come in?" He did not answer her question. "I must speak to you, and I have not long in England."

"Yes—yes. Come in, of course." She stood aside, but threw a fearful glance in the direction of the sitting-room. "But I am not alone—a man friend—only a friend—is with me."

"A man?" He walked in. "Englishman?"

"Yes—you understand it is necessary that I have English friends—especially just now in London. It is not easy at present. Will you come in, or would you rather go into Elizabeth's room for a minute or two, and I will send him away."

"No—I will come in and meet him. Has Elizabeth gone?"

Alixe nodded, and opened the door.

"An unexpected arrival, Dennis," she said nervously. "An old friend of mine, Mr. Weyland. This is Mr. Armitage, Charles. I have been scolding him because he has not rushed to join the new Army as he ought—ought he not?"

The two men looked each other over. The stranger

smiled slightly, and said "How do you do?" in faultless, polished English; which nevertheless had the effect of giving Dennis a cold sensation of jealousy, hatred, and suspicion.

Who was this "Charles" whom he had not seen before, nor heard of? And what brought him so unexpectedly to Alixe's flat—a welcome guest—when she was alone like this?

Afterwards he tried to remember what the man was like, but found it difficult—except that he was good-looking and thoroughbred, and the opposite to that "beastly German" Otto Wertheim.

This man was scarcely above medium height, and of slender build; he was dark, and his skin suggested an open-air, healthy life, tanned by the sun. He had a rather hawk's nose, and keen, piercing, dark eyes; he looked one used to power and command, and his voice was level, cold, and steady. His age might have been anything from thirty-five to forty-five, and was impossible to judge.

As for Alixe, it took scarcely a second for Dennis to see the change in her—how her pretty color had faded to the whitest of pearl, and her eyes were piteous and afraid. Yet:

"I think I'd better go," he said formally—for obviously it was what was expected of him; and evidently Alixe did not want him to stay—nor could he help her if he did.

"You will want to talk—I'll come and see you another time, Alixe, if you will let me know when you will be in."

"I will write to you," she answered quietly. "Let me know when you join up, Dennis. Can you find your way out? Good-by."

. . . . .

The hall door closed after him, and the two who were left alone looked at one another.

"Oh, Carl!" cried Alixe with almost a sob in her voice, "why didn't you let me know you were in England?"

He took her hands and kissed them.

"My beautiful Alixe! And all is well?"

"Well! Oh, *Herr Gott*—it is horrible!" she shuddered. "I hate the idea of war, Carl. I feel I cannot bear it. The thought of all our men, and theirs, being hurt, killed, and —slaughtered! Of all the agony, and the poor women left at home with 'only their eyes to weep with!' Oh—it's horrible!"

"It is war, *meine Liebe*," said the man in his level voice. "And you must face it with courage and a smile. We all knew it would come—have we not waited long in our Fatherland for these days? And now," he smiled, "the English are not ready."

"No—that is the injustice, the pity, the shame of it," said Alixe—speaking German now. "They are not ready, nor do they realize what it means. When you speak to them about it they only laugh and joke, and say: 'It's nothing—it is not necessary for me to go. They have plenty of men without me!' "

"Plenty of men, with their paltry little Army!" The man laughed softly as if he were amused. "Their contemptible little Army of shopkeepers! Truly they are strange people, these English, with their lordly conceit and their blindness! It will be a walk-over, and by Christmas we shall have all the Channel Ports, and England will be on her knees! Oh, it will be an easy win—I could wish they were a stronger enemy, so that it would be a better fight!"

"I wish I were back in Germany, Carl," she sighed. "I wish it were over. I wonder if I shall ever see Erfurt again!"

"Have courage, my Alixe. You hold an honorable position, and you serve your country—always remember that, and ask no more. And you are safe here with your passport and birth certificate—you would not be suspected as some might. Besides, you speak English as it should be spoken."

"So do you, and I often wonder how you do it."

"I? Ah, but then I have studied it, and made it my care. I have the art of 'Kultur'."

"And you have been in England long? Why did you not let me know before, or come and see me?"

"Impossible—and I have not been long in London. Now I return to Berlin—no, do not ask me how. And when I come back I will bring you your papers so that you, too, may return *if necessary*."

Alixe nodded. "You are not going back to the Army? Not going to take your rightful place?"

"Not if I am more useful in this sphere. We are all under orders. *'Zu Befehl,' nicht Wahr, meine Liebe?* With God for our Country and Kaiser."

"Yes." Alixe moved away. "I will get you some coffee, Carl—and do we dine together? I think we can go to the 'Karina.' Mastisch is there still—I saw him this afternoon; and I will telephone for a table."

"You do well, my Alixe." The man laughed—a soft ironical laugh. "We did right to send you to London. The dancing goes well?"

"Did. It is finished now. But I shall remain here until I have orders to move. I hate it, but——"

"You do not go back on it—you do what you have sworn to do, like a good servant of your country?"

Alixe crossed the room. There was a small writing bureau set against the wall, and she opened it. Within a drawer lay an old-fashioned portrait taken in the early nineties, of a pretty, frizzy-haired girl in a tulle dress, such as the ballet dancers of that day wore, with a tight bodice and a spray of stiff flowers. With her was a young man in uniform; and beneath this was a modern unmounted one, of an older man, also in uniform.

Alixe looked at them both—her fingers gripping the edge of the bureau.

"Why, of course, I do what I have undertaken," she said, and turned with a smile. "But I would rather be a

soldier, Carl, and die on the battlefield. My end will probably be most ignominious and unpleasant."

"I do not think the English shoot women, Alixe—if they get you. And there is no reason to suppose they will, or ever should. You know your work—and your prettiness and charm will always keep men enslaved, especially these sentimental English. This man I have met here today—of what use is he?"

"None—he isn't even in their Army, nor wants to join. He comes to see me. I stayed on the East Coast in June—he has relations there, and I made use of them. I make use of everyone, Carl."

"So long as you do not fall in love with him. But you are young——"

"I do not love him—he is nothing to me, as you should know. But even if I did, I have taken my oath, and——"

Again she looked at the photographs within the desk! "Not self, nor life, nor love, nor death shall come between me and my service to my country—my Fatherland."

She shut up the bureau with a slap, and came across the room.

"It's all right, Carl. Give them my love if you go to Erfurt, and tell them I am doing well—an apt pupil of Uncle Egon Helm and Otto Wertheim. Where is Otto?"

"I cannot say. Elizabeth should be in Belgium, nursing our wounded; but it is hard to trace them all now. Yes—make us some coffee, and we will telephone Mastisch at the 'Karina,' and dine there. God only knows when we shall meet again. Alixe—you are prettier than ever!" He caught her tight. "When this is over, you will come home—yes?"

"I do not feel that I shall ever see Germany again," murmured Alixe sadly. "And the War—is not over."

"It *will* be by the spring, and then I shall come and fetch you, and take you back to receive your palms of victory for your little share of service to your country."

He smiled at her—a strange, rather bitter smile—as if

power, grave matters, and secrets had sapped all the joy of life, love, and youth from him. He was not an old man —not even middle-aged—but he looked much more than that sometimes; and his good looks were marred by the lines on his forehead and the arrogance of his expression.

In uniform, he would have looked what he was—a clever, high-born, high-rank German officer. But in civilian dress he might have passed even for British, especially as he spoke English faultlessly and without accent.

He kissed Alixe and bade her be of good hope; but it was still a passionless kiss; for Carl, Graf von Wehlen, of the Imperial Staff of the German Army, in personal touch with the Kaiser and his War Lords, had little time or spirit for love these days.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"I HAVE applied for a commission in the new army, and am going to join as soon as I possibly can," Dennis told his family at dinner, when he was home the next week-end.

"Oh, Dennis! How splendid!" shrieked Jean, clapping her hands. "I am so glad! You'll be an officer, of course —Dr. Eden has gone, hasn't he? When will you——?"

"Jean—be silent," interrupted Mrs. Armitage. "And, Dennis explain immediately what you mean. It is impossible that you really made such an application without consulting me, or even telling me."

"I told you weeks ago that I thought I should have to join, but you would not listen. In fact, last time I mentioned it, you said: 'Let me hear no more of this.' So I didn't."

"But you've really done it!" cried Jean in awe.

"Impossible," declared his mother. "It is not your place to go."

"It may be every man's place yet," retorted Dennis. "Before this war is over we may have conscription in England. And would you like me to wait for that?"

"Absurd! We shall never have conscription in England: a free country. And the War will be over by the spring—everyone I know says so. You certainly must not risk your life so foolishly; so talk no more about it, please, and withdraw your application at once."

"Just as you like about the talking," replied Dennis affably. "I won't mention the subject again. But you can't withdraw your application, you know—that's done, and irrevocable. But I'll come down to say good-by."

"I have already told you that you cannot go."

"But I *am* going," calmly. "If it is necessary we shall all have to go, and why shouldn't I? I have no one dependent upon me, and I am young, strong, and healthy. Why should I hold back and stick at home when better men than I are joining up every day? And as I say, if conscription comes in, and in spite of what you say it is quite possible, then I should have to go, and probably in the ranks too. How would you like that, Mater?"

"I should not permit it. This is England, and we are landowners, and respected gentlepeople. The army they are raising for the War is not for young men like you—and how can you be an officer with no training?"

"Yes—I wish I'd been in the Regular Army, as I wanted to be." A shadow crossed his face. "I should have been at the front now, instead of having to train. But I shall get there all right; and it's no use your arguing, because the thing is done."

Mrs. Armitage looked pale and agitated now. She had a bad cold, and was already wrapped in a big shawl. She was also in a far from amiable frame of mind.

"If you don't come back, there will be no one to carry on the name of Armitage, and inherit this house," she murmured. "If something happens to you—Jean and Phyllis, you may go. I wish to speak to Dennis alone."

Dennis sighed with resignation. He hated being "spoken to alone." There was a certain consolation in having, at least, Jean there, for she always interrupted and took his part. Besides, he wanted to smoke, and write to Alixe.

"Oh, nothing will happen to me—why should it?" he exclaimed crossly. "And it's a moldy old house—that wouldn't keep me at home. I shall probably go through the whole War, too, with nothing worse than a cold in my head and a sore finger—I was always a lucky beggar!"

"You need not be flippant," said Mrs. Armitage severely. "It's not a joking matter. If you were married, it might

be different. I should be glad if you married and settled down, Dennis—it's quite time you did."

So that was what he was in for! Dennis leaned back in his chair, and looked at her steadily. The subject of marriage had not been broached between them since that day in July, when he had told her about Alixe Gerard.

"You have thought about it?" she asked. "Have you not?"

"Well—naturally; you know I have," he answered dryly. "But the last time we spoke of it you did not exactly approve my choice." And impatiently, he tapped his cigarette on the table, wishing she would go.

"I should like you to marry dear Cicely," murmured Mrs. Armitage. "Such a sweet girl—like a third daughter to me. I am convinced she is just the wife for you."

"And I am convinced she is nothing of the sort," retorted Dennis. "As I have told you before, that is quite out of the question—so why discuss it?"

Silence—ominous, depressing silence. Dennis fingered his cigarette, but his mother did not move.

"Why not?" she asked him then. "You used to be fond of Cicely before you met this dancer whom you introduced to me back in this summer. But surely, now, that is all over?"

"What do you mean—what is all over?"

"Why, your infatuation for that woman. Cicely tells me she is German—did you know it?"

"She is half-English. I know what Cicely does—and what business is it of hers?"

"It is her business, because of her affection for you. Are you then entangled with this person?"

"I am 'entangled' with nobody—I am quite free. But I am not going to marry Cicely—so that's that! And will you be good enough to remember—" he rose to his feet in exasperation—"that although I am your son I am no longer a boy to be questioned like this—catechized, lec-

tured, and rebuked. We agreed not to discuss my affairs —let us keep to that arrangement, please."

"Impossible. If you have taken, or applied for, a commission in the Army, you ought to marry before you go."

"If I do, I shall marry Alixe Gerard—I tell you so frankly. It won't be Cicely."

Indeed, Dennis was ready to hate Cicely today, for he, too, had received a long letter from her about Alixe, which might or might not have been written with an ulterior motive.

"Do you ever see Alixe Helm now?" was the burden of her epistle. "I am convinced more than ever that she is a pure German, for I never heard of her having any English connections until we met this summer, and it looks very suspicious, Dennis—why was she traveling about the East Coast in a car, in June? And where did she go when she left Felixstowe? And later, in August? You must be careful now, for we have learned to our cost how many enemies we have cherished in our midst."

And perhaps what made Dennis most furious was the element of truth which the letter contained. He, too, had wondered—puzzled—suspected. And there was no doubt that Alixe would continue to be under suspicion, even if she were innocent. Germans were beginning to be rounded up everywhere—interned and deported—obliged to register at the police-stations, and forbidden to leave or change their addresses without notice.

"I might consent to your joining the Army if you will give up this girl," said his mother, "and marry Cicely."

For answer, Dennis crossed to the door and opened it.

"There is no answer to that," he responded. "I have told you I will not marry Cicely. Will you excuse me, please?—I want to smoke. And—" he turned back—"I shall return to Town in the morning. I am not going to put up with this any longer."

He did not wait for an answer, but strode away down to his "den," where he found Jean curled up in his arm-

chair with a cigarette between her pretty lips and a *Daily Mail* in her hands.

Phyllis was a dull person. She loved her books best; and while she worked with her mother and Jean at the local depot of the Red Cross, she was not really interested in the War and troops, nor did she share Jean's war fever and enthusiasm over the papers Dennis smuggled into the house, and the very latest rumors.

"If only *we* could have a thrilling paper," Jean groaned as he came into the room, "but we don't even see a *Daily Mail,* and no Sunday nor evening papers. And mother won't change—even now. Oh, Dennis—if only I could be a Red Cross nurse! I'd so love to. If only I could go to France with Dr. Eden!"

"With Jack Eden? Heaven help you!" laughed Dennis, lighting his cigarette with a sigh of relief. "And Red Cross nurses don't go to France—at least, not yet. They have only Army nurses at the front. But perhaps it is Jack you want to help—not the wounded soldiers! Anyway, the Mater would never let you go, I'm afraid."

"She might allow me to do Red Cross work and nursing at Longmead, if they open a hospital here; and I believe they are going to at Christmas." Jean knew, at least, all she could about things. "And then, if I do awfully well, perhaps I shall get to France one day, as well as you. Who knows, Dennis—who knows?"

Looking back in after days, how Dennis remembered her gay, careless words—"Who knows?"

"Dr. Eden is going to write to me from the front, Dennis," she went on. "Won't it be lovely to have letters straight from a battlefield!"

"I suppose you think so." Dennis laughed at her—she was so young and enthusiastic. But there came a line on his brow, for: "I'm not sure that I approve of Jack Eden as a friend for you, Jean," he added. "He's not—well, serious, you know. I can't explain to you—you are too

young and innocent; but we will say he is too gay, and has had a good many love-affairs."

"Splendid!" laughed Jean. "That accounts for him being so nice, and never dull. I hate dull men!"

Sometimes Dennis thought there was more in Jean than anyone guessed; and he believed that his mother was making a mistake, keeping her shut up in the country like this. But of what use was it for him to talk?

. . . . .

He was about to leave for London the following morning, and the car was at the door, for he had driven down and was returning the same way, when his mother's maid came to say that Mrs. Armitage wished to see him before he left. She had a cold and was still in bed and remaining there, but it was important that she should speak to him, nevertheless.

Dennis did not like sick-rooms, nor his mother in bed. She wore a white sort of bonnet, beneath which her gray hair was pinned up, and a flannel bed-jacket; and he had a fantastic notion that she looked like the grandmother in the old nursery-rhyme book, which he and Jean had used to read in their young days.

He thought of Alixe, and wondered what she would look like—whether she would wear a cap to cover her lovely curly hair—perhaps one of those pale gossamer things he had seen in the West End shop windows, and a silk night-dress with lace——

"Dennis," said his mother for the third time. "Did you hear me? I said you might obtain a commission in the new army. I have changed my mind."

As Dennis had already applied, then permission was useless, but it was not worth while telling her so; and he was certainly relieved to know that she agreed, and said so; adding a dutiful: "Thanks awfully!"

"On condition," added Mrs. Armitage, "that you marry your cousin, and forget this nonsense about the dancing

girl. Promise me that you will do this, and not see that girl again, and I will meet your wishes about the Army."

She was really rather clever, thought her son—clever and persistent—lying there pretending to be ill, to force his hand. But it is to be regretted that his filial sense of duty did not press upon his conscience.

"No. I'm sorry—I can't do it," he answered quietly. "I must see her again, and nothing will alter that. And I simply couldn't marry Cicely—I don't care about her."

"But this girl is a German, Cicely says. It was surely bad enough that she was a dancer—an adventuress, and probably a light, immoral woman, as these foreign dancers are—but——"

"You know nothing about them," interrupted Dennis. "And that last remark is certainly not true of Miss Gerard. But even if it were, it would be the same to me. No—I'm sorry, but I cannot and will not promise anything."

He got up with determination. "I might as well go," he added, "if that is all you wanted me for—for if I did promise I should not keep my word, nor hold myself bound."

He walked across to the door—opened it and went out.

He was angry now at the position into which she had tried to force him, and the stupid promise she would have wrung from him; and he returned to Town that very morning, thankful that he had taken the law into his own hands and decided at last to get free.

. . . . .

Alixe was apparently away, for he called at her flat to find it closed.

A week later he received his commission papers detailing him to the Royal Fusiliers, and intimating that he would be required to join on a certain date, and train at a certain South Coast camp—all of which was quite in order.

A day or two after there was a letter from Alixe, to whom he immediately telephoned the glad news.

"Delighted to hear it," she answered. "Come up to the flat and say good-by to me. I am leaving London on Saturday for some time, so come to tea tomorrow."

. . . . .

Alixe opened the door to him, looking her prettiest in a fur-trimmed dress with a string of pearls round her neck and pale silk stockings with suède shoes.

Dennis could not help wondering, though he hated himself for it, where she got the money from for her charming flat and pretty clothes, her pearls and furs. For she was out of an engagement, as he knew, and seemed to have few friends, now that her Germans had disappeared.

"I am going north," she told him as she led him into the sitting-room. "Got an engagement in Liverpool. I don't like it, and I hate leaving my pretty flat, but it's only for a few months and better than staying here alone. It is bad enough without Elizabeth and—and the others. But now even you are going, so I should find it hateful."

"You told me to join," said Dennis quietly, taking his usual seat in the corner of the big chesterfield couch. "I shouldn't have been in such a hurry but for you."

"I know; I wanted you to join." The tea was ready, and Alixe began to pour it out, not looking at him, and seeming jerky and nervous in her movements. "When do you go? In ten days: that is splendid; I am glad. I shall not mind so much leaving London when you have gone too. And—no, you cannot write me."

"Why not? Of course I shall write to you."

"There will be no address. I do not know where I stay. But I—I have liked you, Dennis, and I wanted to say good-by."

He nodded rather miserably and did not speak.

"And, Dennis"—she pushed his cup across to him—"whatever—if ever—you hear of me what is not good,

will you remember that I *wanted* you to join the Army? I wanted, and want, to think of you as a soldier. You——" She laughed, but there were tears in her eyes. "You will make a pretty officer in khaki, Dennis; and I'd love to see you."

"You will see me when I come home on leave. I shall come straight to you, Alixe." He got up and came across to her. "Marry me before I go. Let me feel I am leaving you all right. It's so hateful to think you suspected and hunted about; and if you were my wife you would be a British subject."

"I am a British subject; don't worry about that, my dear. Suspicion won't hurt, and all my papers are in order. I have no fears."

"But—you wouldn't let me see them, I suppose?"

Alixe met his eyes with a steadfast look, and shook her head.

"So you don't quite believe me! No, my papers are private, and I show them to no one, not even you; but I assure you, Dennis, I shall be neither interned nor deported. And though I am grateful for the honor you do me, I am tired of saying no. You came to say good-by—then let us have this little half-hour and be happy. Here is your tea, will you not drink it? And I have made cakes for you specially."

"I don't want either. I want you, Alixe." He caught her in his arms. "I can't help it; you are everything in the world to me, and I don't care what you are—I love you."

She let him kiss her, but there was no response in her lips, and she closed her eyes.

"You don't care for me a bit? It's this other man whom I met here last time I came."

"Not at all," she smiled at him. "I care for no one as you mean it, Dennis. There is no *grande passion* in my life. I like you; you are a dear boy; but no, I do not love you, and if I did—still I would not marry you."

"And how I'm going to live without you I don't know." He let her go. "I can't think what I shall do—life has been so different for me since I have known you."

"But you will have your country, which is greater than any love." She drew away and looked at him with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. "You'll be a soldier, going into real battle; and at the front you'll soon learn to forget. You must, Dennis, for we shall never meet again. Forget —or learn to hate instead of love me."

"Don't be silly; I couldn't hate you, not whatever you did. Alixe, I want to give you a present before I go. You have never taken anything from me, not even the ring I've always wanted to give you; but I have ordered my regimental crest to be made and sent to you. Everybody is wearing them, so you can't refuse. And will you wear it? It will be quite simple in platinum and diamonds—very small, you know."

"And very expensive, I have no doubt!" She smiled, drew his head down to hers, and kissed him. "Of course I'll wear it, and think of you all the time. You must have something of mine, too, Dennis, to take into battle, because you mustn't forget that you are 'my perfect knight,' without fear or reproach. What will you have—my handkerchief? It should be a gauze sleeve: I think that is what the ladies of old used to bind round the arm of their knights. But a handkerchief will have to do."

She fetched one—a square of fine cambric—with "Alixe" embroidered in the corner. It smelled faintly of lavender, and Dennis put it to his lips.

"Keep it with you." She laughed a little, but her voice was unsteady and her eyes full of tears.

She broke off with a breathless little sob, and Dennis caught her in his arms and kissed her wet eyes and trembling lips. He could not understand her, for this was not like Alixe at all—the girl who laughed and danced, teased and flirted.

"I shall always remember and love you," he cried;

"always think of you. And your handkerchief shall never be away from me, living or dead. Good-by, Alixe—though I know if I live I shall meet you again, and perhaps, if I am killed, well—in another life. Who knows?"

She clung to him for a second or two, then drew herself away and went to the door. She was laughing again now as she opened it.

"Good luck, Dennis," she said. "Carry on!"

He could find no words to answer her now. He caught her hands and kissed them, then went out without looking back.

. . . .

Ten days later he took up his commission and went into camp.

Part Two

"DER VATERLAND"

CHAPTER ONE

MARGUERITE ALIXE HELM GERARD, to give her her correct name, sat alone in the pretty sitting-room of her flat on New Year's Eve, 1914.

The engagement at Liverpool had lasted three weeks, and she had no intention of taking another; in fact, she danced no more, having other and more important things to do. But she had finished with her friends for the "duration of war."

She was now sitting before her writing-bureau, turning out the many little drawers and partitions, and looking through the letters, papers, and diaries which it contained.

It was fitted with a strong key which she wore on a chain round her neck; and so long as Elizabeth Piper had guarded the flat like a dragon there was little danger. But now, when she might have to leave it at a moment's notice, she decided that the papers, or such as were necessary to keep, would be safer in a trunk which she could take with her.

Reading them again, and looking at the photographs, brought it all back to her like a cinematograph picture from the day, which now she could but dimly recollect, when as a small child of six she had been taken from England to Germany.

At the time Alixe had only known that she and her mother traveled a long way until they came to Uncle Egon's house in Erfurt—a big gray stone building on the side of a hill, overlooking a moat which, as she after-

wards found, ran entirely round the old town and was crossed by dozens of bridges.

There were huge fir woods, always black against the sky winter and summer, the Steigerwald and the Thuringian forests; and there was a fortress called the "Petersburg," now a barracks; a beautiful cathedral with twin pale green towers, and the quaintest old town imaginable.

And there were innumerable soldiers everywhere. They marched and they drilled, they played bands, rode, and maneuvered; in fact, there was little they did not do; and so interested was she that Alixe remembered how sorry she was when they went to Berlin.

A little later, when she had grown into a proper little German girl with two long plaits of hair hanging over her severely plain plaid dress, and wearing a black apron and big boots, in which dress she went to school, she understood that her pretty mother had run away from England and her English husband because he was so unkind to them.

"Mamma" was very pretty—Alixe used to sigh and wish she would grow like her—and she was a famous dancer both in Berlin and Vienna. Most of the little girl's childhood was spent between these cities, but they never returned either to Paris or London, lest (as Mamma said) they should meet Papa, and he should make them go back to England—horrible, cold, foggy England where everybody hated them and was unkind and unfriendly.

Mamma had gone there when she was quite a girl to dance at the "Alhambra" in London—Alixe learned all about it in time—and there she had met Papa, whose name was Philip Gerard, a young officer in the British Army. (Alixe took up a photograph and looked long at it. Such a nice-looking boy, for he had been only twenty-three at the time of the marriage in 1890—tall, dark, and slim, with the then compulsory military mustache, and large eyes which reminded her of her own.)

Foolish Philip, of an old and irreproachable family,

to marry a dancer! But that was a period when young men thought it smart to frequent stage doors; and sometimes Alixe wondered if pretty Cora Helm had not done her share towards that unfortunate marriage because "Papa" was rich and handsome.

It was not a happy marriage—Alixe knew that early. Her parents, left to themselves, might have survived the disillusions of young married life; but their relations never left them alone. His family would not recognize Cora—looked down upon and patronized her despite her beauty and talent; and even Philip's love was not proof against their tongues. He adored his little wife and the baby daughter, but he hated to have Cora continue dancing in public, and Cora disliked the thought of giving it up and probably living with her superior family-in-law. She loved her tiny house and, unfortunately, she welcomed to it sundry German relatives whom Philip loathed.

There was Uncle Egon Helm, who was a General in the German Army, and there was Cousin Friedrich—"Freddie" they called him—and others equally Teutonic and objectionable. In fact, sometimes Philip thought they were more than objectionable—dangerous; for they had nasty inquisitive habits of wanting to know and see everything: they were constantly asking their English "relative," as they called him, to show them over important military places, introduce them to his superior officers, and obtain passes for them.

Everyone knew, even then, that this was the German temperament, and that they loved learning English and spying out the land; but sensitive young Gerard disliked it so much that he and Cora quarreled again and again over it, each time worse than the last, until the day came when he openly told her his own and his relatives' and friends' opinion of her people and her nationality.

He was called away on military duty that day, and when, a couple of days later, he returned to the tiny

house in Kensington, Cora had gone, taking her five-year-old daughter with her.

Alixe dimly recollected the flight, and throughout her childhood spent traveling with her mother, remembered always the bitterness and resentment Cora Gerard felt towards her husband. Out of this bitterness grew an intense hatred, the fruit of a hundred little mistakes, irritations, fancied slights and insults, and quarrels. It was fostered by her family—the Helms in Erfurt—fed by slander, and nurtured like a tender sentiment. But only Cora herself knew the reason at the back of it.

She had left her husband in England in a fit of pique and temper, but she meant to return when Philip either wrote and said he was sorry and could not live without her or came himself to fetch them back.

And Philip neither came nor wrote—that was the root of the trouble. His solicitors did, and told Mrs. Gerard that she must either return, or, failing that, send back the child—to which Cora angrily replied she would do neither.

She would not have her little Alixe ill-treated, neglected, and bullied by those horribly superior Gerards, sent to an English school and taught to forget or hate her.

She had returned to her profession, and her relations would befriend her. Little Alixe would be cared for and suitably educated, but she would not give her up without a struggle.

Litigation continued for a while, but it was not easy to trace Cora and the child, who traveled from city to city, and country to country, as her engagements demanded. And gradually, as Alixe remembered, it dropped, and ceased altogether when Philip Gerard, now a captain in the Army, went to South Africa on the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899.

There had been no divorce for, as Alixe knew, there had been no cause for it, as far as her mother was concerned. Cora was devoted to her profession only, and

she had simply returned to it and to her own country—to nurse an undying hatred for her husband, England, and all things English.

Alixe, one might say also, was brought up upon a hymn of hate against the British nation, for all the Helm family seemed to share the antipathy with poor Cora. And as a child, indeed until she was twenty-one, she never saw a portrait of her father nor her English home.

There were portraits, papers, her mother's marriage and her own birth certificate in her mother's possession; but even when the latter died suddenly while on an engagement in Berlin, these important documents were taken by her uncle to be kept until Alixe, at that time barely fourteen, should be of age.

Alixe remembered those terrible days very clearly—her black crape-trimmed clothes and the black veil on her hat, the flowers in her mother's room, the callers and cards; and then Uncle Egon and Aunt Bertha coming to take her away after the funeral.

She sighed a little, remembering this, for she had not felt nearly so broken-hearted as she ought to have done, and had even been chided by Aunt Bertha for laughing at something amusing she had seen. But her mother had been very difficult lately—temperamental, querulous, and cross. She never realized that her little daughter was not now six years old, that she wanted to go to a proper school, learn French and music, and even dancing, and have pretty clothes instead of the everlasting plaid dresses and black pinafores.

Uncle Egon who was, of course, her great-uncle, took her back with them to their house on the Cyriax Burg at Erfurt which she remembered and, from now on, Alixe attended, first daily and then as a boarder, a large and first-class school, which numbered several English girls among its two hundred pupils.

How she hated those English girls! Alixe could smile now at her memories. It was here that she had met and

known Cicely Harding, and had hated her to begin with, as much as the other "nasty stuck-up cats," as she called them (or the equivalent in German) with their linen collars, shirt blouses, and sailor hats; their walking-sticks, and generally superior air.

Finding she was half-English, they had made some attempt to be friends with her, but it was a long time before Alixe would even accept their patronage. In fact, she went to her uncle one day and asked him what on earth he had sent her to such a school for.

"There is no other in Erfurt to which you can go."

"But I need not stay in Erfurt, need I? I have plenty of money, so why cannot I go away to Leipsig or Dresden?"

"It is a very excellent school, and you will learn very good English there."

"I can speak English—I have not forgotten it."

"You do not speak well, and it is necessary you should. One day your English father may send for you, and we should be ashamed were you to go to him unable to speak his language."

This threat never failed to make Alixe furious.

"I shall not go—nothing will ever induce me to return to my father, even if he is alive and should send for me. I hate England and the English."

Uncle Egon would look at Uncle Friedrich, and they would laugh. But Aunt Bertha would say:

"No, no; do not talk so to the little one! It is not well. Children should love, not hate."

Nevertheless, Alixe remained at the school, and in time she tolerated the English girls who came and went, and was polite and pleasant to them whether she liked them or not.

She also polished up her very rusty childish English with a head mistress who spoke flawless languages, until at eighteen she would have passed anywhere as an English girl had she not voiced her dislike.

She was sixteen when Cicely Harding came to Erfurt, and the latter was nineteen, having completed her education in England and come to Erfurt merely to study music and languages.

Alixe had taken up dancing and music, following her mother's example; but it was obvious to her relations and her teachers that she did not possess the same great talent. Undoubtedly she would dance, and might well take it up as a profession, but she would never be a Pavlova, a Gaby Deslys, nor even a Cora Helm: she had neither the patience nor the exquisite art.

"It matters not," said Uncle Friedrich to Uncle Egon, smiling at each other. "There are other professions, and our little Alixe needs not the money. She shall dance to amuse and enrapture, but it is not necessary she should be as clever as her mother was. Indeed, perhaps it is better not so."

The Helms were not now in the Army, for the old General had retired, and "Uncle Freddie" had served his full time, and carried on a business in the town. But his son was in the Navy, and all of them seemed still to have something to do with both, for officers of each of the Forces came frequently to the house, on business as well as social visits.

Alixe was now thoroughly German. She *schwärmed* for the officers with all the absurd ardor of a schoolgirl until she was seventeen, and then she spent it all upon one man who came to the house one day to see her uncles.

It was during the holidays, and Alixe met them at *Mittagessen*—Graf Carl von Wehlen, of the Cuirassieren from Berlin, and Herr Otto Wertheim. She did not know what the latter was, for he was not in uniform.

(Sitting alone, Alixe shut her eyes at the memory of that first meeting, and saw it again as if it had been but yesterday.)

Carl von Wehlen, in his pale blue and silver uniform

of the Kaiser's Cuirassier Guards, with his silver helmet, and enormous sword with the silver double eagle on the hilt—she had no photograph of him, but he was not a man whom anyone, having once seen, could ever forget. And clear before her eyes she saw him still as he was then —a man between thirty and thirty-five years of age, above medium height but not tall, and spare of figure, although his lifelong training had given him a well-set-up appearance.

Dark, clean-shaven, and aristocratic, with a rather hooked nose, and piercing, compelling dark eyes; a clever keen face with a somewhat bitter and even cruel mouth, but when he chose a most charming smile.

His voice was quiet, deep, and musical, and he spoke English and other languages as faultlessly as a German ever can—that is, almost without accent.

Alixe had been presented to him, and told to make her *knix* to the Graf, who belonged to the Kaiser's Imperial Cuirassier Guards; and she did so adoringly, and with much wonder as to why such an exalted person came to their house, even if Uncle Egon was a retired *Excellenz General*. And the Herr Graf had looked at her and smiled so that she never forgot, and had spoken to her in English because her uncles had told him that she was half-English.

"I am not English at all—I hate England!" she had declared fiercely, and she recollected how they had laughed.

There was another day about that same time which stood out in her remembrance very clearly—a fine August morning when, with all the two hundred of her school, she stood, massed to form the letter "W" on the cathedral steps at Erfurt to welcome the Kaiser: a flashing, thrilling figure to them all, riding through the town in his light blue and silver uniform and high-plumed helmet, at the head of fifty of his own Cuirassier Guards.

The Kaiserin was there: a white-haired lady, simply dressed and driving in a carriage; and she received a

bouquet from one of the youngest girls in the school. But she was quite a nonentity beside the Kaiser: the central figure of Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, excluding, of course, King Edward.

Cicely Harding had been very superior that day. She did not share the national enthusiasm for the German Emperor, and refused to wear the broad band of red, black, and white which encircled the German girls in their white dresses, and the wreaths of cornflowers which crowned their plaits.

Neither would she join in singing:

"Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles,
Über alles in der Welt,"

which the children's voices were raising in swelling harmony as if to burst their throats.

Alixe had sung as loudly as anybody in all the vast crowd, and felt every word of it. She hoped *Deutschland* would be *über alles,* above everything in the world—and that England would have to bow down in submission when *Der Tag* came. For so, she felt, would her mother's wrongs be avenged.

She also hoped, however, that Fräulein Werner, the head mistress, had not forgotten that the Kaiser had proclaimed a general holiday in Erfurt today, and therefore she would be free after dinner. She wanted so very much to go to her relations on the Cyriax Burg, just in case, by the remotest chance, the Graf von Wehlen should pay them a visit, as he was here with his Cuirassieren in attendance on the Kaiser, and the Royal party was not leaving until evening.

She obtained permission to go, but he was not there, and a glimpse of him riding past that evening was all that Alixe had obtained.

Still her *schwärmerei* continued, and the girls at school laughed at her about her wonderful exalted Count von Wehlen.

"So silly to think about a man whom you have only met once," Cicely had said in her superior way. "I don't suppose he even remembers your existence. Men don't remember little girls, and you are only seventeen!"

"Men are going to remember me," Alixe had answered. "Even the Graf von Wehlen. And I am grown up in Germany and not a little girl."

She was quite right—men did remember her, but it was not for the reason she anticipated.

Cicely Harding went home to England the following Christmas; and in the summer, before she was eighteen, Alixe also left school and went to live with her uncles.

She continued to keep up her dancing and music lessons, and also, by her Uncle Egon's express command, her English (both reading and speaking), which command she could not understand, for again and again she assured them that she would not go to England, even if her father should send for her.

"Yes, yes, you will go one day when the time comes," said the old General. "You have a debt to collect from your relatives, and your—father. Think, *mein Kind!* Remember how they treated your sweet mother: the unkindness, the insults. And while there is your father with so much he has never troubled even to write to you. We have kept you, brought you up, and educated you."

"With Mamma's money," put in Alixe shrewdly, for she knew more than they gave her credit for. *"Nicht wahr?"*

"E ben so," replied her uncle. "Your poor dear Mamma worked hard all her life to provide for you. She would not take a pfennig from Philip Gerard: he did not offer it. Oh, yes, *mein Kindchen,* you shall return to England when we are ready. There is work for you there that a girl can do."

Alixe had understood vaguely by then what he meant, for in the years she had lived with them in their household she had learned that the thing which her own

father had suspected long ago was the truth. The Helms belonged to a family where espionage was an honored profession.

There were many families in Germany before the War with whom it was so. They excelled in this particular branch of treachery, and really loved the thrill and danger of the game. They gloried to think they were serving the emperor and their *Vaterland;* and they knew neither truth, honor, nor decency in the following of their cause.

CHAPTER TWO

ALIXE took up her diary—a worn, shabby old book, with faint gold lettering. It had been the fashion when she was at school to keep a diary, and write in it every day; and she, lonely among her relatives, for there was no other young person there, had kept it up in English: partly because it was practice in writing the language, and partly because the Helms could not read English well, especially her scrawl, which ensured it being private, as otherwise it would certainly not have been.

She decided that she had better burn this, together with her letters; but first, just once more, she would look into that tragic past which had brought her here to London, to sit alone by a dying fire on New Year's Eve.

Almost the first entry was the coming of the Kaiser to Erfurt, and there were several others at school (only several, because Alixe had never troubled to write it every day) which she passed over quickly, for that part of her life did not interest her very much now. Then:

September, 1910. I am nineteen today. Aunt Bertha says it is quite time I was *verlobt*, but I ask her to whom shall I be *verlobt?* Will she then that I marry the doctor's son who has straw-colored hair and stick out teeth, or the *Lehrer* from the college who wears spectacles? And I do not wish to marry an officer, for then I might not dance, for it would be *anständig*. No, I will not be married yet. I would rather be a dancer like my mother, for if I marry, then it is that I become only a housewife, and I have no life, and no adventures.

Too, I would wait and see *mein Lieber* again first—the

Graf von Wehlen, for one day I feel he will come back. Uncle Egon has told me so.

Uncle Egon does not wish that I be *verlobt* yet. And Uncle Freddie, he laughs—always he laughs; and once he said: "What about Kurt? He is a *See offizier* on the 'U' boats. I should call them submarines. And he has no hair and big eyes."

I have, therefore, asked Uncle Egon if I may not join a troupe of dancers and go with them to Berlin and Vienna, as my mother used to—to Paris and Brussels.

But not to London, I think, for London was unfriendly to my mother, and she found much unhappiness there.

Uncle Egon says: "Presently, *mein Kind*—perhaps. But not quite now." So I must wait, although it is dull here in Erfurt, with nobody to talk to but the uncles, Aunt Bertha, and their friends. We seem to be waiting for something, but I do not know what it can be.

. . . . .

There was a big interval here with no entry in the journal, except an occasional résumé of the weather, and remarks about her relations, of whom she became exceedingly tired. Then:

Neu Jahr Abend. (New Year's Eve, 1910.)

The Graf von Wehlen has come back. He came to supper tonight, and I feel sure, although nothing was told me, that he was expected. Aunt Bertha said:

"Put on your new white dress tonight, *Liebes Kind*; we have guests for *Abendessen*." And that was all.

I wore my dress—a pretty white *crêpe-de-Chine*—one which Uncle Egon had given me for Christmas, and I bound my plaits round my head and tied them with a ribbon.

When I had finished and was ready, I looked at myself, and sometimes I think I am rather pretty. My hair is nice, neither gold nor brown, and my eyes are dark, and my nose straight. I am not at all like my mother. She was

small, very fair, and dainty like a Dresden shepherdess. They called her: "Pretty Cora Helm," and no wonder. But I cannot be like my father, for Uncle Egon says he is old and ugly. Curious it is, but I cannot remember him at all. I remember a young man who came and played with me, who laughed and had curling hair; but the uncles say this was not my father. And when I ask, they say I am to stop, for it is not good that I should know.

But it is that I would write of Carl von Wehlen, and how he smiled and spoke to me. I think he is very handsome, with his dark eyes, his proud look, and soldierly bearing. I am told he is personal friend with the Kaiser himself, but I do not understand if this is true why he visits our poor house. For poor it must seem to him after the mansions and palaces of Berlin.

After *Abendessen*, he and the uncles and Herr Wertheim who had come with the Graf talked privately together. Then, to my astonishment, they sent for me, and Uncle Freddie said would I please dance and show the *Herrschaften* what I could do. He said that Herr Wertheim had to do with theaters and perhaps would obtain for me engagements presently.

I did not like to dance for I was nervous with the Graf seated there; but at last I fetched Aunt Bertha to play the piano, and I danced a Scottish Highland Reel which I remember my mother used to do.

It pleased them much, and they laughed and clapped their hands. The Graf said: "*Gnädiges, Fräulein*, you are perhaps not aware how charming and pretty you are." But I do not think he meant it.

Then, because it was *Neu Jahr Abend*, we drank *Bowle*, and shouted: "*Prosit Neu Jahr*" till it was early morning, when the Herr Graf and Herr Wertheim left. I wish they had stayed longer.

January, 1912. A strange thing has happened: Uncle Egon has told me I am to visit Switzerland for the winter

sport. He has arranged that I go and join some friends, the Burgendorfs, in Mürren, at the beginning of February. I wonder why he is suddenly so kind, but when I ask if Aunt Bertha is not to come too, he laughs, and so does also Uncle Freddie laugh, and says: "No, no; it is you who are to go. It is that you meet English people there, and make friends with them, and speak their language so that presently, when you shall go to England, it will not appear strange to you, nor shall you appear strange."

"But I am not going to England," I replied, as I had so often done before.

"Presently, presently!" said Uncle Egon. "We will see about it in the summer. Yes"—and he laughed again as if it were a huge joke—"you must visit your rich father!"

I have been thinking very much, and I wonder if the uncles want me to work for them—to help them in their "cause," and the *Vaterland*, as they speak of it. They have hinted at it several times, and I am puzzled. Is that why they are sending me to *Die Schweiz*, that I am to begin my "training?" I do not know the Burgendorfs well, for they are in trade, and we of the military do not know and visit with those who carry on trade and manufacture. I cannot understand it; but I will not do it, that I know. I will go away and earn my own living—dancing, as my mother did. If I am, as the Graf said, "pretty and charming," then I can make money. And I think there should be some money for me from my mother.

But I will not be a spy. There, I write it now, and it is true. They are spies, and I believe they would make of me one, too.

Later. I have told Uncle Egon I want to dance and go away, but I will not go to England and visit my father. He did not say anything, but just looked at me from beneath his bushy gray eyebrows until I squirmed. But I said: "No, *mein Onkel.* No!" and I know he understood what I meant. Then he patted my shoulder, and: "Do

not worry thyself, *mein Kind*," he replied. "It is that we wish you to enjoy yourself in *Die Schweiz*. The Burgendorfs are worthy people, and will take care of you, and all shall be well, and you shall dance to your heart's delight and contentment. But wait a few months!"

So I go to *Die Schweiz*, and then I will try if I can get an engagement. Perhaps Herr Wertheim will help me if I tell him.

Mürren. .February, 1912. *Die Schweiz.*

So much to write, so much to tell, I do not know how I shall begin.

I am here in a beautiful hotel such as I have not known before, even when my mother lived and we traveled together. I have a big bedroom with a balcony, and I can see the skating-rink below like a mirror in a frame of trees and slopes. There are mountains across the valley —the perfect Jungfrau, the Eiger, Mönch, and the Wetterhorn, all gleaming white with the sun upon them. The sky is deep turquoise blue, and everything is just perfect because I am so happy.

But it is not that I would write how Mürren looks, for one knows that already: there are many people here, and most of them English. I would tell you of my journey, and why I am so happy.

Uncle Freddie and Aunt Bertha took me to the station, and put me into the train with my ticket, my new fur coat, and my little leather hand case. The Burgendorfs were already here, so I had to make the journey alone, which I liked to do, for it was the first long journey I had made since Uncle Egon brought me to Erfurt when my mother died six years ago. I breathed a sigh of happiness and relief as the huge black train steamed out of the station and sped south, and I dreamed of freedom at last, and sunshine.

We came then to Wurzburg in the evening, and here the *Mitropa* sleeping-cars came on, and I was given a berth. The train was not full, for it is new that we have sleeping-

cars to Switzerland (as I must now call it), and they are very expensive. Indeed, I was surprised that the uncles paid so much that I should go first-class and have a sleeping-berth; and I had the coupé to myself, much to my pleasure.

So then we have dinner, and as I came out from my coupé into the corridor I almost collided with a man coming from the next one to mine.

He apologized at once; and his voice—I looked at him. A soldierly man in a gray suit, beautifully cut, and a black tie, with a soft hat, and—I knew at once that my dreams had come true. He did not wear uniform, but it was the Graf von Wehlen, and this was the Swiss express! Then he, too, was going to Switzerland?

At the same moment he recognized me.

"Ah, *Gnädiges Fräulein*, but I have met you before," he exclaimed; and not as if he was very much surprised either. "It is Fräulein Helm, *nicht wahr?*"

I said "yes," and I felt that I ought to curtsy, as I had done when he came to our house in Erfurt; but I am grown up now, and I remembered this, and did not.

He asked me where I was going all alone, and I told him about Mürren and the Burgendorfs, at which he smiled, and then said that he, too, was going to Switzerland—to St. Moritz, however.

It was now dinner-time, so he suggested that I went down with him to the dining-car, and we dined together, as we were both alone, to which I did not know what to say, I was so pleased. And yet I felt nervous.

This wore off, however, while we dined, and the Graf insisted that we drank Hock. He talked to me of my mother, whom it seems that, years ago, he had met at the house of the Helms, and whom he called the "beautiful accomplished Cora Helm."

I said: "Of course, her real name was Gerard, and that is my father's name and mine; but after she returned to Germany she continued to call herself Cora Helm."

"Yes, yes; I know the story," he answered. "I have heard it all. And you, Fräulein Helm, will be Miss Alixe Gerard when you dance professionally in Berlin, Paris, and London."

I had no idea he knew about my longing to dance and go away, but apparently he did, and he smiled at my surprise.

"The good uncles have told me much about you," he said. "I am greatly intrigued."

Such a beautiful word—"intrigued!" And to think that I, or my story and aspirations, could intrigue the Graf von Wehlen!

We sat talking over the little table in the *Speisewagen* until the other passengers had left, and then we walked back to our *Mitropa*, where he said good night. He, too, has his coupé to himself, but he said it was so reserved as he did not like to share with another traveler. He carried important papers, which told me that he was not going to St. Moritz only for the winter sport.

"Will you have coffee with me in the morning?" he asked. "We shall reach Schaffhausen about seven, and Zurich an hour later. Shall we drink our coffee at seven, then?"

I said how pleased I should be, and with a *Schlafen Sie Wohl*, we said good night.

The sun was shining in the morning as we crossed the frontier into Switzerland, passing through Schaffhausen along by the Rhein and the famous Rheinfalls all glistening with silver spray in the sunlight, and I do not think I have ever felt so happy in my life.

My one regret was that it was nearly over, for Herr von Wehlen (as he told me I must call him, and not Herr Graf) was to leave me at Zurich. He said he would see me into the train for Lucerne, Interlaken, and Mürren, but he was going the other way to the Engadine.

Then, while we drank our coffee, he said suddenly:

"Why not come to St. Moritz? Must you stay in Mürren?"

"The Burgendorfs are there," I answered, "and I do not know their plans, nor how long they stay. And my uncle would not let me go anywhere alone, so I must."

He nodded. "I will arrange it for you," he said in his extraordinarily quiet voice. "I will let the Herr General know that I met you, and then I will come to Mürren and tell you what he says—yes?"

"Oh, that would be *wunderschön!*" I cried. And I know I blushed, for the idea seemed to take my breath away. "Will you really come, Herr von Wehlen?"

He looked at me for a long time, and I do not know what his look meant. It was kind, and yet it was the look of a cat when it would catch a bird or a mouse—as if he would pounce upon me and devour me. And while I was happy and thrilled, I was also a little afraid. I do not know why.

"Yes, I will come," he answered. "When do you go to England, Fräulein Helm?"

"To England?" I gasped in amazement. "I am not going to England at all, unless I get an engagement to dance there. What made you ask me that?"

"Your uncle, the Herr General, intends you to go there and join your father."

I felt the blood rush to my face. "I will never return to my father—never!" I cried. "I am German, and Germany is my Fatherland. I hate the English—I hate them!"

Herr von Wehlen did not move; he just sat and smiled.

"Ja wohl!" he answered. "That is as it should be."

"Oh, I know what you are thinking," I cried again, crimson with shame at my uncles; for I knew by now that their "cause," or profession, was not even a secret. "But I will do nothing that my uncles wish. I will not help them, and it is my intention to leave them very soon and earn my own living so that I shall be free."

"Ja wohl!" repeated Herr Wehlen. "The uncles are

brave servants of the *Vaterland,* however, and to them honor must be given. But you, *natürlich,* it is different."

The train was running then into Zurich *Bahnhof,* and he rose to gather together his baggage.

"Do you know our watchword?" he asked me as we said *"Auf wiedersehn."* "No? This is it, then: 'With God, for Kaiser and Empire'."

And so here I am at Mürren, and I am going to enjoy myself—learn to skate, to ski, and to toboggan. I am going to dance and be happy, and one day the Herr Graf is coming. I wonder how soon it will be!

February, 1912. *Mürren.*

I have been here two weeks now, and though I have had what Fräu Burgendorf calls a good time, yet I am not enjoying myself too much, for there is no letter from the Graf. I have learned to skate, and the Englishman who taught me says that I am very quick at sports. I am quick at everything—at love and hate, as well as sports.

I danced for the *Herrschaften* in the *salon* last night, and it was greatly admired.

Now I learn to ski, for I would be good at every sport. But I wish Herr von Wehlen would come.

Another day.

The Burgendorfs say they must return at the end of the month. He has business in Erfurt. They are very mysterious, and I do not like them much. I wish I could stay in Switzerland, but it cannot be, I fear, although I have written to Uncle Egon to ask him if I may. I do not want to go back while Herr von Wehlen is here. I have told Uncle Egon about him.

Fräu Burgendorf has brought me a letter, just come from my uncle. He says: "It shall be arranged—I do not wish you home till the season in *Die Schweiz* is over. See well that you mix with the English. You may easily pass for one with your slim figure and your fluent English

speech. Dance with the Englishmen—skate and ski with them—and you can stay perhaps——"

Hateful man! I know what he means now. He is coming into the open, but I will never do it.

February. At Mürren.

He has come! I came in from the rink yesterday, and he was in the hall talking to the Burgendorfs. Strange—I did not dream he knew them, and he did not tell me so.

He turned as I came in and held out his hand to me.

"My charming Fräulein Alixe!" he said. "So I have come, you see."

I did see, but I don't know what I said, and the Burgendorfs just slipped away and left us.

At *déjeuner,* however, he joined us at our meal, and then, looking round the room, he asked us:

"You know many English people here? In St. Moritz it is mostly English visitors, and one hears little but English spoken."

"Alixe does not like the English," said Herr Burgendorf. "She will not dance with them. I think it is a pity, for they are partly her own people, *nicht wahr,* Alixe? And you speak so good the language."

English! English! It haunts me, and I hear nothing of anything else. Shall I never be free of it?

And now the Herr von Wehlen looked at me with that slow smile of his, and his dark compelling eyes. How he can know and like the Burgendorfs I cannot understand.

"And so you must return to Germany," he was saying to them. "And Fräulein Alixe—what about you?"

I told him I did not want to go, and that my uncle had written perhaps I might stay, but how I did not know.

"Yes, you are to stay," he replied. "It is arranged. You remain here, or at Wengen where there is a quieter hotel, and where you will be in the care of the proprietor's wife—a good German. I will see and arrange it."

"Have you seen my uncle?" I asked in astonishment. "Or does he write you, Herr Graf?"

"I saw him," was the reply. "I have been again in Erfurt since I met you."

I do not know whether I like the Graf after all. He arranges so much without asking, and I do not like my life arranged for me. He makes me feel a child, and I am not.

"And you, Herr Graf," I asked, "do you return to St. Moritz, or remain here?"

He turned his eyes to me and smiled. "I remain here for the present, Fräulein Alixe, until I see you settled. Then, who knows——" and he shrugged his shoulders.

Wengen. Later.

The Burgendorfs have returned to Erfurt, and I have moved to a quiet hotel here where there are not many English. I spend my evenings, however, at the Palace Hotel, and I skate on their rink, for Carl is staying there. He remains until the end of the month. I have been here in Switzerland four weeks, and many people are leaving, but we are to stay, and then we are going to Interlaken for a few days.

Carl will have me dance there at one of the big hotels, as I dance here, and we are to meet Herr Wertheim, who is to try and get me an engagement later in the year.

"I do not want to go to London," I have told Carl—of course, I do not call him Carl, but Herr von Wehlen. "I will go to Paris, but not England."

"London is more useful than Paris just now," he replied.

It cannot be possible that Carl, too, is in the "cause!" He has had me taught skiing, and we have long runs over the snowfields, for on the higher slopes it is still as midwinter. Himself, he is good at all the sport—and how like an Englishman he looks and dresses. Carl would never be taken for a German, and I must confess, though

I hate them so, I do admire the English, especially their men. They are so slim and tall, and look so clean and healthy, though not one can compare with Carl.

I told him so one day when we were skiing, and he laughed as if he were amused.

"You do not love the English, do you?" he said. "Really, you should be a great help to the Fatherland! But why do you hate them so?"

"I have reason to," I answered; and I told him about my poor pretty mother, and how we had run away. I said, too, how I hoped, if he was still alive, to "get even" with my father.

He looked at me with his curious compelling gaze which I cannot understand. He frightens me, too, for I have the feeling that if he tried he could make me do anything he chose, and I do not want to. Sometimes I am afraid of him.

"Would you like to come to my *Schloss* with me one day, Fräulein Alixe?" he asked me suddenly. "It is in the Black Forest, and not very far from the border. We could take the train to Schaffhausen and drive from there, for the country, even in winter, is very beautiful."

I knew by now that he had a castle somewhere in South Germany, for his was an old and noble name, but I had not dreamed it was so near that we could visit it, and I was interested at once to know all about it.

"The other side of the Boden See—there is the Black Forest," he said. "Perhaps you would also like to visit Friedrichshafen where we build our Zeppelin airships that one day will destroy England and blow London Heavenwards."

Our Zeppelin airships! I had heard of them, of course—but for such a purpose, no! I stared at Carl in horror.

"Do you really believe, Herr von Wehlen, that there will be a war between my two countries? Impossible!" I said.

"Impossible that it should not be so," he answered. "I

do not 'believe,' I know; and for that we are prepared in a hundred ways. I will take you to Friedrichshafen, and you shall see. I think we might leave here soon—there are few people left who are of any use—and we must certainly meet Otto Wertheim within a few days. Also, I must visit my *Schloss*. You do not wish to stay here?"

"Not without you." I do not know what made me say that, for I can never tell yet whether I like him, or whether Carl really likes me and regards me as a woman or only as a child. He calls me *"mein Kind,"* and sometimes *"Liebes Kind,"* but generally we speak English together.

"You do not wish me to leave you?" he said again. "You would come with me?"

What did he mean?

"I'd love to come with you, if I could," I answered gaily. "But what will my uncle have to say about it?"

"That, too, can be arranged," said Carl, as he always did. "I will let the Herr General know my plans."

He did not tell me his plans—whether he intended to stay at his *Schloss* or not. I do not even know whether he is married, and if his wife lives there. I do not think I will go, for I do not know if I like him or not. He frightens me: he is so calm and calculating, so all-powerful—and his eyes compel me. I wish I were back in Erfurt, that I had gone with the Burgendorfs; but I felt so important asked to stay and friends with the Herr Graf. And I enjoy myself when I do not think.

"I wonder why you interest yourself in me," I remarked. "I am nothing, and nobody. Why should you?"

"You are rather beautiful," he replied frankly, using the word *"Schön,"* and speaking in German. "Don't you know that yet, *meine Liebe?"*

I had begun to suspect it since I came to Switzerland, but: "Nonsense," I said. "Anyhow, you do not like me."

"What makes you say that?"

"You do not look at me as if you did—you look past

me, and through me. And when you look at me you frown."

He laughed. "You are a problem, *Liebe* Alixe, you see. And me—is it that you like me?"

"I don't know." I frowned, too. "Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't, because I am afraid of you. I—" I laughed as I said it, but it was true, and he knew it—"I don't in the least want to fall in love with you. I think you would be very cruel if one did."

This time his eyes looked at me till I turned mine away.

"Time will show," he answered. "What is to be—will be."

I wonder what he meant!

Later.

We leave tomorrow for Interlaken and Zurich, *en route* for the Schloss von Wehlen. We are to meet Herr Wertheim in Interlaken, and he is to arrange for me an engagement in Paris and London. All goes well. When next I write in . . .

. . . . .

But there was no more written in the journal for months. Yet, like a picture before her eyes, every day of those following weeks passed before Alixe Gerard.

CHAPTER THREE

BY the end of February it was so warm at midday that skating was impossible, and skiing, except on the higher slopes, decidedly soft and sticky. Avalanches, too, made this dangerous, and then von Wehlen decided that the game had gone on long enough, and it was time to leave. Most of the English visitors had returned home already, and there was no further information to be gained from that source.

So he and Alixe went down to Interlaken, and after a couple of days there, on to Zurich and the Black Forest. Here at a station not far beyond Schaffhausen they were met by a car with a chauffeur in livery, and he informed her that they would drive the remainder of the way, arriving that same night at the Schloss von Wehlen.

Alixe was distinctly nervous, though she put on a brave front, and laughed; but she did not know where she was going, nor who would be there when she arrived.

She had laughed and called it an adventure, and said that she would "love to go," knowing in her heart that however afraid she was of him she had not the courage to say good-by and leave him; but as the miles and hours passed her fears increased. It grew dark and began to snow, and the lonely road wound up through dense black fir forests towering on either side. They left the villages behind, and there were no lights except those of the car showing the road a little way ahead.

Alixe shivered and crept closer to her silent companion.

"I suppose your man knows the way, but it is very dark!"

"He knows it well—so do I. We are not lost."

"But what time shall we get there?"

"About ten o'clock. It is a long drive, and uphill all the way. But there is no main railway line within twenty miles of Guldenburg, our village."

For a few minutes Alixe was silent. Then:

"Are you taking me to your *Schloss?*" she asked.

"Why, yes, *meine Liebe—natürlich!*"

"And—who is there? Have you—Herr Graf, are you married? Your wife is there?"

He laughed softly. "No, I have no wife, *Liebe* Alixe. A wife would interfere with my work. I am not married. But do you not worry—I have a housekeeper at the *Schloss* who will be pleased to look after you."

"But"—she moved away—"does my uncle know where I am going? Is it with his permission?"

"The Herr General has left you in my care until you return to Erfurt."

Alixe sat gazing out at the darkness, the waving trees, and the swirling snow which every minute grew thicker around. Her heart sank, and she felt she could have cried with nervousness and loneliness. There was something else, too—the shattering of a great illusion.

She had worshiped Carl von Wehlen for years: he had been her hero and idol. Now, she knew the man, and that he was neither. Instinct told her where he was leading her with his quiet, compelling manner and eyes, his deep voice and strong hands; and reason urged her to turn back before it was too late.

Like a bird she fluttered at the bars of her cage——

"I won't go with you—let me go back!"

"Where? All along this road at night—alone?"

"I don't care, I'm not afraid of that, but I don't want to go to your *Schloss* with you, nor anywhere. I don't like you."

"A sudden change!" He laughed again—the same soft laugh. "Why, what have I done?"

"Nothing—but—is there no one but servants at your castle? I cannot stay there alone."

"You will be my guest, and I will take care of you. Why should you be afraid of me?"

"I don't know why—but I am. Let me go back."

"You cannot. It is night—dark—and snowing, and you would soon be lost. We are ten miles from a village and railway."

Alixe reached for the door handle, but he was before her and imprisoned her hand in his.

"Do not be so foolish," he said quietly. "If you got out, I should leave you there and you would die in the snow; or, if you tried to walk back, from exhaustion. Stay here—we shall be there in an hour."

Suddenly he drew her into his arms and pressed her head down against his shoulder. She struggled for a moment, and then, finding it useless, remained still.

"Are you so very frightened of me?" he asked presently.

"Yes," answered Alixe. "I want to get away from you. I don't want to be in your arms. You do not love me, and I do not want to love you—I won't love you!"

"Yes, you will," said Carl von Wehlen. "You love me now, and you will love me more than anyone or anything in the world. I intended you to from the night I met you on the train. I intend you to now, and it is inevitable; so it is useless to fight against me, *meine Liebe.*"

He swept her close in his arms, and covered her face with kisses.

. . . . .

It seemed to Alixe that they had been driving through the dark wintry night for many hours, when at length they reached the village of Guldenburg, and climbed the steep hill to the *Schloss* which overlooked it.

It was all in darkness, but at their coming, lights sprang into being; and a huge fire was crackling in the centuries old hearth in the vast hall as they entered.

There were servants, both men and women, who looked as if they, too, were centuries old, but still obedient to their lord.

A hot supper was spread on the table in the hall near the fire, and in answer to his peremptory inquiry, the head of the little staff, a wrinkled old woman, said that rooms had been prepared as ordered, and all was ready.

"You keep this house always open?" asked Alixe, looking around with reluctant interest.

"Yes—the servants have been here for years, and it is useful to have a place where one may be quite private. Sometimes we hold conferences here—my Kaiser has visited me on more than one occasion. You will find it very beautiful when it is light, *meine Liebe;* but the drive was long and alarming, and you are tired."

He poured her out a glass of champagne and brought it to her sparkling in a chased silver goblet.

"Come—drink to our Fatherland, and our cause!"

Alixe had taken the glass from him, but now she set it down.

"No—not that. I will drink to the Fatherland, and even to the Kaiser; but not to the 'cause'." She hesitated and looked at him, waiting, glass in hand. "So—you are in it too!"

"Natürlich!" answered Carl von Wehlen. "And so are you, *meine Liebe.* Come—drink!"

"I will not drink to it, and I will help neither my uncles nor you. Tomorrow I will leave here."

For a minute she thought he was going to make her drink, and his eyes scintillated points of light.

Then he laughed, and tossed off his glass of wine.

"I can wait," he answered her. "But you will not leave here tomorrow, nor for many days. You are my guest, and we have much to do and see. Drink your wine, without toast then—no, there is nothing in it; you need not fear. You saw me pour it from the bottle; and see, if you are still nervous, I will pour half into my own glass and

drink it—so! Now I fill up yours, and please to drink, for you are weary."

Alixe obeyed, but she was almost too tired to eat, and was glad when the meal was over, and the housekeeper, with a lighted lamp in her hand, led the way up the curved staircase to the room prepared for her.

It was large, with two high narrow windows overlooking a lovely garden, now covered with the last of the winter's snow. Apparently the castle was built on a hill or rock, and the entrance was on the slope—for this room, although only on the first floor, seemed high above the garden.

The room was richly furnished. The bed hangings were of velvet, and the rug on the highly-polished floor a beautiful old Eastern one. At any other time, Alixe would have been delighted and thrilled to sleep in such a really rich and royal room, so full of ancient romance.

She had wanted to come, and gloried in adventures, and this *Schloss* was something out of the Middle Ages, and very much worth the long drive in the dark. But —she stood in the center of the room, shivering violently although a wood fire burned in the open hearth. She had never been so frightened in her life.

"Can I do anything for you, Fräulein?" asked the woman, eyeing her with a little curiosity. "Your baggage is here—and see, I have put hot water—towels—all is ready. Is there anything you wish for?"

"Nothing, thank you." She walked to the fire and held out her hands to the welcome blaze. The fir logs sent out a strong pungent odor, and their flames burned red and green.

"The Herr Graf said you were to have all you desired—his orders were plain."

"I want nothing, thank you," repeated Alixe. "Only to be left alone. I am very tired."

The door closed and she heard the woman's footsteps echoing down the polished floor of the corridor. Her room was at the end, and had windows on two sides, but there

was no other door than that by which she had entered. She knew it was useless even to think of trying to leave it, for she had no idea of the geography of the castle. She had come up the main staircase, and if she went down it again into the hall, there sat Carl. And on the mat before the entrance lay his dog, a great Dane, on guard.

She took off her fur coat and flung it on to a chair, for the room was warm.

She would have to spend the night here, and then, in daylight see if she could find means to get away.

Then she crossed to the door, but as she expected, although there was an old-fashioned lock on it, there was no key.

Well—she shrugged her shoulders—there was only one thing of which she could be robbed. She had little money in her possession, for Uncle Egon was not generous. He paid the bills, and gave her her railway tickets and clothes, but he did not seem to think pocket money at all essential, and she was not yet of age to manage her own affairs, and have her own money—even if there were any left by this time.

He had left her to Carl, and Carl was at least generous; but just now her one desire was to get away from him. She walked back to the fire, pulled up a chair, and sat staring into it, wondering——

Why did Carl bring her here? Why had he made her care for him like this?—for there was no doubt that it was deliberate from the beginning, and he had played for it. It was impossible to think that he cared for her, for although she was pretty, Alixe knew she had little else as yet with which to attract.

She sat gazing into the heart of the blazing logs, seeing pictures—herself as a dancer—mountains—rivers—the sea of which she had often dreamed—and yet could but dimly remember—Carl—and Carl always there—drifting——

Alixe opened her eyes to see him beside her, though she

had not heard him enter the room; and she sprang to her feet.

"You were asleep," he said. "Why are you not in bed, *mein Kind?*"

"Why are you here?" she asked. "As your guest—is not my room private?"

"Not to me," was his reply; and he laughed dryly. "Did you think I should let you go so easily? Can you not yet realize that you are mine?"

Alixe looked at him almost pitifully. "I am tired," she said with a little catch in her voice. "Let me go tonight, Carl—I shall be here tomorrow."

"Oh, yes, you will be here tomorrow," he answered quietly, "and for many tomorrows. For, once you are mine, you will not want to go—to leave me. Our love shall be everything to you, and your whole life's happiness shall lie within my arms. But would you have me wait until tomorrow to teach you that?"

She shivered and shrank away. "And then," she said with unspeakable bitterness, "you would make me a spy like yourself, my uncles, and Otto Wertheim. Do you think I do not know? You do not love me, Carl—if you did, you would not be here tonight. It is love of power—you believe that you can do anything you like with me, and that you are all-powerful. Perhaps you are."

She came to him and put her hands upon his coat. She was small and slim, and tonight looked tired and white.

"Carl," she pleaded, "you have made me care for you—I will admit it. But be merciful now."

"As merciful as you like—tomorrow," he answered without moving. "And you are wrong—I do love you, as such a man as I can and dare love. If things had been different, perhaps I should have loved you more, who knows—for you are beautiful, and you attract men. You attracted me when first I saw you, and I knew your possibilities. I know what you can do—and what you will do, for me!"

"Never." Alixe stood away. "England is partly my country, though I have no love for, and little remembrance of, it. And I will not be a traitor—not even for you."

"You will do whatever I tell—and order you to do," said Carl von Wehlen, and he took her forcibly in his arms.

Alixe fought desperately against him, and against the almost hypnotic influence he had over her—against the overwhelming love she bore him. But it was an unequal struggle from the beginning—both mentally and physically. She was tired, and like a child in his strong grasp. She had no chance, and had known it from the moment she saw him in her room.

. . . . .

Alixe Gerard shivered in the warm firelight as she recollected those days in Guldenburg at the *Schloss*.

Lieber Gott! How she had loved Carl! How he had won her until nothing on earth mattered but him and the love she bore him!

No thought of right or wrong—of morals, conventions, or religion had stood in her light; and no question of marriage was raised between them, for she had realized all along that von Wehlen had no intention of marrying her; or else, could not do so.

He told her this in so many words, as he had done before on the drive from Schaffhausen.

"Marriage is not for me. I serve my Emperor and my Fatherland, and until my work is done, and my ambition is achieved, there can be no love, as you see it, in my life—no home, children, or domestic bliss. Yet, I am very fond of you, *Liebe* Alixe, and you shall be my *Petite amie,* and my little comrade in arms. You shall learn from me how best you can serve your country. I will take you to England—you shall have an engagement to dance, even as your mother did, in London—and we shall see what you will discover for us."

Alixe fought to the last ounce of her strength; and as

she had fought physically against the man, so she fought mentally against his influence. And again the struggle was unequal.

"I will not go to England with you—I will not!" she told him. "I will not be a spy under a master spy."

Carl von Wehlen only laughed.

"We do not use that word, *mein Liebchen,*" he answered lightly. "We are secret agents, or members of the secret service—friends and servants of our Fatherland—friends who seek the undoing and perishing of our enemies, and the glory of our Kaiser and our country. We know England plots against us—we know they contract an alliance with France; and is it not then up to us to protect ourselves against such treachery? You have nothing to love England for—robbed of your name, your inheritance—of the right to a father and a home! You should be glad of this opportunity to pay your debts, and your mother's."

Alixe did not know when, but in time she came to agree with him, and had no more strength nor desire to argue and fight. Gradually, through that spring, while they lived at the *Schloss,* watching the budding of the trees in the valley and the coming of the first flowers after the winter snow, until April when the forests were aglow in their dress of glorious young green, and the meadows and slopes a carpet of wild flowers—until then he kept her there a prisoner of love and his influence, till in time her sense of honor grew dull, and both honor and truth were dimmed.

Nothing mattered much by then except the man; and he was a strange and unsatisfactory lover; for sometimes he went away for days together, and she did not hear anything of him. Sometimes guests, always men, came to the *Schloss,* and then she kept her own rooms and did not appear; and sometimes, even when they were alone, she would not see him, except at meals, for a day or two if he was busy—and she was left to eat her heart out in loneliness.

In between these occasions, however, there was plenty to amuse her—horses to ride, tennis courts, and Carl's new and beautiful Italian car to drive. She learned all these things, and to do them well; and when she did not think, she was happy. But now, ever the specter of approaching separation haunted her.

Carl von Wehlen had said she must return to Erfurt for Easter, and keep up her dancing. She must be ready at any time to accompany him to England.

Alixe agreed—she had become a good pupil by now.

. . . . .

So, back in Erfurt at her uncle's house, Alixe took up dancing seriously, and began to teach now at the school where once she had been a pupil; and always she waited, not only for Carl, but for the opportunity to get away. For it was quite clear to her on her return that her uncles knew where and with whom she had been during these last two months, and had willingly permitted it as a means of getting her not only into von Wehlen's, but also into the power of the "cause" they served.

Not even Aunt Bertha asked any questions, and life went on exactly as it had done before, for months.

Once or twice Carl wrote to her from London, Paris, Rome—but she had no address to which to reply, and no knowledge of his whereabouts and plans until the end of the summer, when he walked one day into the Helms' house on the Cyriax Burg.

Alixe was at the school giving a lesson, and she found him there on her return—learning to her joy that he was spending a couple of days in Erfurt.

But now, as she found, Carl von Wehlen was quite different. The friend, comrade, lover, had gone, and he was a man of power. He would not answer when she asked him where he had been—he merely smiled; and Alixe came to realize that he was no ordinary spy, but a

"master"; and that no one knew where he went, nor what he did, except those (unknown) in highest authority.

He stayed two days—then disappeared, and it was November when he returned.

And now it was put to Alixe at a conference, one night, if she was willing to join the "faithful servants of the Fatherland," and take their oath of allegiance.

She did not know two or three of the several men gathered in the room, and only saw one. With Carl von Wehlen's almost hypnotic eyes upon her, she answered unhesitatingly.

"I wish to join you—I am ready to take any oath."

"It is dangerous," they told her.

"I love danger, and I have no fear."

"You can have no friends, nor trust anyone, man or woman, outside the fraternity."

"I shall have all I want." She looked at Carl appealingly, and his hand held hers in a strong warm grasp as if he would never let her go.

"There can be no love in your life, unless you marry with a *good German,* and you may have no home for years."

Alixe's eyes mutely sought Carl von Wehlen's. She wanted no other love than his now, and no other home than with him at his *Schloss.* He was all she had ever longed for and dreamed of, so she thought, and she would rather die pleasing him and winning his approval, than live without him.

She took the usual oath:

"With God for Emperor and Country," and another:

"Neither self, nor love, nor life, nor death shall come between me and my Country which I serve, and will serve till death."

It passed her lips like a hymn of praise.

. . . . .

"You will go to Paris at Christmas," ordered Carl von Wehlen later, "and in the spring to London. You will

have engagements to dance at hotels where there are naval bases—Southsea which is Portsmouth, and near Southampton—Plymouth, Scarborough, and other places. Otto Wertheim will arrange all that for you—he is frequently in England and knows it well. I will take you, but I cannot remain there, nor with you; I have other work to do."

Alixe nodded with a rather sick feeling of disgust at everything, and the fact that now she, too, was a member of the band.

It was November, and outside the rain was falling steadily. She wandered into the salon, and stood alone gazing through the window, wondering, now that she had her marching orders, what England would be like.

How her mother had hated it!

There was a large painting of Cora Helm in the salon. It stood on a draped easel, and her daughter turned to look at it as she had so often done before, trying to think of her, and how cruel her father had been—trying to harden her heart.

Someone came into the room and stood behind her.

Alixe's sixth sense told her, without turning, who it was; and she waited for his arms to enfold her before she spoke.

"Oh, Carl! I will do anything in the world for you, but must I do this? I hate it so!"

"There is no going back," was his reply; and his voice was quite hard. "And not even love nor death must interfere with your service. If you fail, and are caught—that is up to you. If you are a traitor to your country, *we* shall deal with you. You must play straight and go forward, my Alixe—you cannot withdraw now. And," he drew her close, "if we live, I will take you back to my *Schloss* one day, as your reward."

CHAPTER FOUR

IT was early May in England. All the blossom was out over the countryside—the lilac and laburnum, the hawthorn and the double cherries. Everywhere was a riot of color, pale green leaves, white, pink, gold, and purple blossoms.

Here a huge clump of rhododendrons, crimson, mauve, and pink, here a garden filled with tulips like a myriad-colored carpet, or a wood yellow with daffodils.

Alixe Gerard, who had been Alixe Helm, stopped the car to look around and draw great breaths of delight. Germany had her wonderful fir forests, covering miles and miles of hills and dales—her big shining rivers and her gray old castles—her long white roads edged with fruit trees, and here and there a trim garden—but nothing like this wild countryside.

Switzerland had its snow-covered mountains, woods, and green slopes, and the glorious Alpine spring flowers—the huge purple and white violets, the heavenly blue gentian and the rare Edelweiss—but Switzerland had not these green meadows with their hawthorn hedges white with blossom, the buttercups and the forget-me-nots.

Or, was it because it was England?

And now the car moved on, and they drove beside a little tinkling stream over a narrow bridge with old rough stone sides, and down a narrow lane where there were violets in the hedgerows, and yellow and white celandines.

Presently they came to a gate with a little thatched lodge, and the driver of the car got out and knocked at the door.

"Did Colonel Gerard live there?"

"Yes," answered the neat, gray-haired woman, coming out to open the gate, "he does. And will you please drive up to the house."

The man put his hand on the top bar of the gate to prevent it opening.

"No thanks," he said, speaking with a strong foreign accent. "I drive this lady here, and she will walk up to the house."

Leaving the woman he walked back to the car.

"It's all right, Alixe," he said. "You walk up and make yourself known to them. I will go on to the village, and wait for you at the inn—there is sure to be an inn."

Alixe remembered how pale and queer she felt. It was —she did not know why—like coming home after many years. And yet it was not home, because she had no recollection of ever having been here before; and all she could remember and think of, was how happy her pretty mother might have been if only her father had been kind and wanted her.

"Very well, Otto, I'll walk up and ask for him," she said, getting out of the car. "And—if I should have to stay, I will telephone you at the inn—yes?"

"You need not stay, but do so if you think it would be advisable."

The woman of the lodge was staring at them, and Alixe hastily went forward and passed through the little foot-gate.

"Straight on up the drive," said the woman. "There's a birthday party on—one of the children; but Colonel Gerard is at home."

. . . . .

What a lovely, typically English place, thought Alixe—a wide graveled drive with a grass verge on either side; meadow-land, and trees with sheep dotted beneath them, and then an old red-brick house with a crinkly roof all corners and gables, funny shaped chimneys, and odd

diamond-paned windows. A dear old place, and it all looking so homely.

There were gardens stretching down one side, and she could hear the shouts of happy children, and the music of a gramophone——

Alixe wished that she had not come.

She stood a minute in the drive before the entrance, and thought how lonely and alone she was. This should have been her home—she was Philip Gerard's eldest daughter, although now she had learned that he had married again since her mother's death, and had other children.

This should all be hers—and was not. She was an outcast, earning her living dancing at a London hotel; and her mother had died when she was but thirty-four! Alixe had always persuaded herself that she had died of a broken heart, from the treatment and neglect she had suffered.

Setting her teeth, and remembering her errand, she walked boldly forward and rang the bell.

It was answered by the butler, an elderly family servant who said: "Colonel Gerard is engaged this afternoon—is he expecting you?"

"No—but I think he will see me. I am Miss Gerard."

"I beg your pardon, Miss?" ejaculated the man.

"I am Colonel Gerard's daughter," repeated Alixe. "But I have only called to see him—I want nothing from him. Perhaps you will tell him I am here."

The man motioned her to come in, and closing the door again led the way to the library—explaining that the drawing-room was in use for the party.

"Please be seated, Miss," he said, showing her into a book-lined room with a deep window recess, looking over a quiet and shady part of the garden. "I had better tell my master it is—Miss Gerard? Or do you wish to tell him yourself, Miss? It will be a shock to him, I fear."

"Then you can do the telling," replied Alixe. "Only, please add that I have only come to pay a call. He need

not telephone the police, and I shall not steal his valuables."

The man stared politely, and went out, while Alixe crossed the room to the big writing-table, and stood there breathing fast, and staring at a large portrait of her mother upon it.

It seemed a long time she waited standing now by the window, and now walking to and fro, picking up things and putting them down again. Then the door opened, and a man came in, closing it after him. He stood and looked at her, and Alixe looked back.

He was tall, well-built, and soldierly, with bright brown hair inclined to curl and slightly gray on the temples, and blue eyes. He had a short military mustache, which did not hide a well-shaped, strong, humorous mouth; and when he spoke his voice was well-bred, pleasant, and musical.

"*Are* you Alixe—the daughter of Cora Gerard?"

"I am Alixe Gerard," she answered. "Cora Helm, or Gerard, was my mother, and I have come to see my father. Does he know that I am here?"

"*I* am your father," said the soldierly man simply. "I am Philip Gerard who married Cora Helm twenty-two years ago."

"You! But my father must be much older than you!"

He smiled. "I was only twenty-three then—now I am forty-five, and if you are Alixe, you are twenty-one. Let me look at you—" he came forward. "Yes, you are like my Cora—but you are like us, too. Thank God they have not made you into a German!"

Alixe winced as if he had struck her, and with difficulty suppressed a cry: "Yes—I am German! I am! I am!" But she had a part to play which required careful playing. She smiled faintly.

"Oh, no—I am English as much as German. You see, I speak your—I mean my language, and I am told I even look English."

"You are remarkably pretty, like your mother; and yet

—oh, prettier!" He came forward with outstretched hands.

"Alixe—I'm delighted to see you! I always wanted you to come home to me, child—this was your proper place. Won't you kiss me, Alixe—and say you are pleased?"

She let him kiss her, but restrained the flood of longing which rose within her to throw her arms round his neck, and tell him that she was just as delighted as he. She forced her mind to dwell upon Otto Wertheim waiting for her at the inn—upon Carl——

"I understand you have married again," she observed, "since my mother died."

"I have," answered her father. "I married an old friend—very soon afterwards, I'm afraid it was too—and I have two little kiddies. Alixe—you will love them, I know! It is Anne's birthday today—she is eight years old, and we are giving her a party. You must come and be introduced to them all—how Anne will love a grown-up sister!"

Alixe groped for a chair, and sank on to it.

"Oh—but I am a stranger! What you call an 'outsider,' and I cannot do that. I would not have come had I guessed it was a birthday party. No, no—I had better go; you cannot want me, and your—your wife." She hesitated.

"My dear, of course we want you," began Philip Gerard, "and is this not your home? Ruth will love to have you, as I shall; and Anne——"

The door was softly opened, and a lady came in.

She was tall and slender—as tall as her husband—and her hair was tinged with silver; but she had a sweet, kind face, and shining eyes, and her voice was like music.

"I *had* to come," she cried. "Johnson told me who your visitor was, darling, and I simply had to come and see her—So *you* are Alixe? Oh, you beautiful little girl! Why didn't you come before?"

Alixe rose to her feet, dazed at this totally unexpected

welcome. She had expected her father to be an elderly choleric colonel—gray and red-faced, who would roughly demand her business, and what she wanted of him coming like this after fourteen years, unwanted and unwelcome. She expected a sharp-featured angular Englishwoman who would probably be rude to her, and insult the memory of her mother—not this!

"Dear!" said the lady in the beautiful blue dress—the color of summer skies and sun-kissed seas—and she drew her down beside her on the couch.

"Why did you never come before? We have waited and waited for you—written and written."

"Written!" repeated Alixe incredulously. "Did you write to my relations then? You did not write to me."

"No—we wrote to your Uncle Helm," put in her father, "after your mother died. Until then I could do nothing, for she was determined to keep you, and I suppose she wanted you; but when the Helms let me know that Cora had died, I wrote and asked that you might be sent to me, so that you could have an English education and take your proper place. But they never even replied."

"And we wanted you," cried Mrs. Gerard; "we would have made you so welcome. You should have gone to a beautiful school—didn't you want to come? Well—better now than never, isn't it, Philip? Kiss me, dear child, and be welcome——"

"But you can't really want me!" Alixe looked from one to the other. "And I haven't come to stay—I only meant to call—because I was in England, and—and I was so curious to see my own father."

"You have not come to stay!" Both exclaimed it, staring at her in astonishment. "But why not? Where are you living, and why have you come to England?"

Alixe told them in a low, quiet voice, that she had taken up her mother's profession, and was dancing in London. No—not like Cora Helm at the top, the "Alhambra" or "The Empire," but at much smaller shows. It was not

ballet dancing, but fantastic, exaggerated modern turns, and also dances little known in England—the Tango, and Sanfanda the latest American craze, and the new "Hesitation" waltz.

She had come to England just a month ago, and was living in rooms in London, and—and really she had only come to call.

Philip Gerard and his wife looked at one another in dismay. "Oh, but this is impossible!" he said. "You have no need to work, Alixe—neither had your mother after she married me. But in her case she was at the top of her profession, and like most of them she hated the thought of giving it up and living without the footlights. But you cannot have been doing it long, since you tell me that you did not dance professionally until you went to Paris, so why continue it? Is there no money from your mother?"

"Her money was not left to me, or if it was I have never been told so, nor was it given to me when I came of age. My uncles brought me up, educated and kept me—and perhaps they took all the money. I don't know—" she looked rather pitifully at her father—"I don't know anything about it."

"Then, by gad, we will!" declared her father. "I thought Cora had plenty of money of her own, for her relations and lawyers refused to take a penny from me, even for you, though you were my child. Perhaps they thought that if they did I should put in a legal claim upon you, which, of course, I could have done had I chosen. But as I told you, I thought perhaps poor Cora needed you more than I—" he smiled as his wife—"she was alone, and I had family and friends. It was not that I did not want you, however, as your relations could have told you. Again and again I wrote asking for you, and for news of you. And now you are here," he paused——

"Supposing you stay for a few days," suggested Mrs. Gerard, "and think it over—see how you like us and the

children." She put her hand on Alixe's shrinking one, and held it. "Then we can talk about it another time when you have had tea. Come with me and I will take you upstairs to the bedroom we used to think you should have, when we hoped you would come to us."

Alixe looked at her father, and thought of Otto Wertheim.

"I have no luggage—I did not come to stay," she said.

"I can give you all that is necessary, and we can drive into the town and get anything you want tomorrow," said Mrs. Gerard.

"I must telephone—I came down by car, and it is waiting in the village. He said he would wait at the inn."

"A taxi, or a private car? Is it a chauffeur?"

"No—a friend drove me down. I must telephone him not to wait."

"Perhaps you would like him to come here?" They did not seem very pleased at the idea, however, and Alixe replied quickly:

"No, no—I do not. He is a German who has business in London—a friend of my uncle's. No," as her father looked dismayed, "he is not a young man, and is nothing to me but an old kind friend. I told him I wished to see you, and he offered to drive me down as, you see, I do not know England well—the trains—and everything."

"I will telephone him, then, that we are keeping you for the present," said her father. But this Alixe could not allow. She followed him to the telephone, and he listened to her brief message in German—and did not understand a word.

Then, up the broad shallow staircase with Mrs. Gerard, who said she must be called "Aunt Ruth," for she could not expect to be "Mother" to Phillip's daughter, but "Mrs. Gerard" was much too stiff. Into a beautiful bedroom looking down on to the garden, where she could see the children playing—their dresses like rainbow colors in the sunshine, and their shouts like music.

Rather different to the flats and hotels where she and her mother had lived, and her childhood had been passed!

"You must have married my father soon after my mother died," she said slowly, looking around, "if your little girl is eight."

"Yes—we were married a few months afterwards," was the reply. "You see, we had known one another all our lives." They stood side by side at the window.

"Let me tell you," said Ruth Gerard. "I had known Philip, as I say, since we were children. I am a year younger than he, and when I was very little I used to hope that he would want to marry me. But your father was good-looking, and—gay, and he wanted to be in the Army and fight, and have an exciting life. And one day I heard he had married your mother. I saw her once when he brought her home to his family (oh, no—not here. This is our own house.) She was very young and pretty, and I shall never forget her, but—but she did not fit in, you know. She could not get used to English country life and ways. We were all dreadfully sorry when we knew about the marriage being a failure, and then afterwards—long, long afterwards—when we heard of her death, Philip and I married, do you see?"

"There might have been a divorce," said Alixe in a dull tone. "I wonder he didn't divorce mother."

"There was no suggestion of such a thing—not on either side. Philip was, and is, too good a man to do anything morally wrong. Besides, dear child, think of the scandal to an old family! He would have had to send in his papers, and resign his commission in the Army; and that would have broken his heart, for your father is a great soldier and will, one day, we hope, be a General."

"He might have tried to divorce my mother, though she too——" Alixe stopped.

"She, too, was good," finished the other. "Of course she could not be otherwise. It was simply too great a difference in temperament—they were incompatible. And yet your father has never forgotten—and I do not

wish him to. Your mother's portrait is always where you have seen it today—there is another in his dressing-room, and one of you as a tiny baby as well. And now—" she moved, "I must return to my little guests. Please us, dear Alixe, by making yourself quite at home, and join us in the garden, or in the drawing-room for tea, as soon as you like. I know your father is longing to talk to you again."

Yet Alixe stood a long while by the open casement, leaning against the frame watching the children at play in the lovely old garden. Presently she saw her father join them, and with shrieks of merriment a game of rounders commenced.

Alixe smiled as she thought of Uncle Egon, or Uncle Friedrich, both heavy, massive men, playing rounders with a dozen children; running like a boy——

And yet she could imagine Carl von Wehlen doing so with his own children in the grounds of the *Schloss Wehlen*—with the cares and responsibilities of his unhappy profession lifted from his shoulders.

"Oh, Carl!" She put up her hands, clasping them on her breast. "Oh, Carl—why, why did you make me come to England!"

. . . . . .

"I ought never to have married Cora, your mother," said Philip Gerard, talking to Alixe in his library late that evening, when the party was long since over and the children gone home and to bed. "It was not a question of marrying beneath me—I dare say your mother was as good as I—but it was too great a difference. Never marry out of your sort of life, Alixe—it's a mistake."

Alixe nodded her head. "Yes—I don't think I want to get married at all. I'd rather dance, and be independent."

"But there is no necessity for you to dance now. Why not live here with your Aunt Ruth and the kiddies? There are plenty of people for you to know, and you will

soon find enough to do. You shall have a little car, my dear—and a horse to ride if you like; we have splendid hunting here in the winter. I do not want you to go away again, Alixe."

Alixe's troubled eyes looked away into the early summer dusk, and she answered with a question:

"You are in the Army, aren't you, Father?"

"Of course I am. I thought you knew that."

"Are you on leave?"

"Oh, dear no—we are not so very far from Colchester, where the barracks are—but I am a Staff Officer and I do not have to attend parade at six o'clock in the morning now, you know."

"Oh—you are on the Staff . . . of the Eastern Command?"

"Why yes—are you so interested? Of course the German Army is so different to ours, it will be hard for you to understand. Theirs is so huge, and everywhere, I believe, while we have comparatively few military towns."

"It is all very interesting," murmured Alixe. "And you go to Colchester? Do you have maneuvers there—gun practice?" She laughed. "Of course not—you must forgive my stupidity, but I have lived so long in a German military town, and seen so much of it——"

Philip Gerard raised his head, and looked at her.

. . . . .

Alixe gave a little shuddering sigh—then she dropped the papers she held into the glowing fire.

There were letters from Germany, from the Helms, and her school-friends—letters from Aunt Ruth begging her to come again to "Little Hollow," that delightful Suffolk house where she had been so happy—letters from Dennis Armitage, love letters—but in they, too, went, and the flames rose up and devoured them.

Somewhere outside the bells were ringing in the New Year, 1915—and somewhere out on the plains of Flanders, the British and the Germans were fighting to the death——

Part Three

THE EAST COAST IN 1917

CHAPTER ONE

IN the spring of 1917, Dennis Armitage was sent to an East Coast camp for six months' rest.

He had been over two years on the Western Front, and had come through with no more than a few scratches; but it had been to him, as to so many men—especially those who had joined the Army during the first few months of the War and had been sent out with very short training—a long and exhausting period, and a terrible strain on the nerves.

It was considered advisable, therefore, that they should have a few months in England to "pick up," and try to forget some of the horrors of France in one of those East Coast camps where the conscript army, and the C.2 and C.3 men, were being trained.

Captain Armitage, as he now was (but with no decorations), was a gunner, and found himself with a detachment of artillery, trying to drill the rawest and most awkward recruits, and to teach them how to manage machine guns so as to do more damage to the enemy than to their own lines; and how, if necessary, to defend their own country.

This was at Mundesley, four miles from Elverstrand where his uncle was still Rector of the parish. But what a changed country it was to that he had always known!

The East Coast was a vast camp from Yarmouth to Sheringham, closely guarded by sentries all along, partly closed in places to all except the military, and trenched for miles along the cliffs, through gorse, bracken, and heather, with barbed wire fences, splinter-proof dugouts, signalling and wireless huts complete.

It was all very necessary, too, for the East Coast had

been systematically raided for two and a half years—occasionally bombed by "Gothas," and shelled by German cruisers. There were floating mines in the sea which sometimes washed inshore and threatened to blow the villages sky-high, and strange ships appeared now and again on the horizon, creating wonder as to whether they were not enemy vessels about to raid the peaceful Norfolk country villages, imagining them naval bases or important military ports.

The cliffs high above the sea made excellent natural training grounds; with the sands at low tide for bathing and exercise; but Dennis hated it nevertheless, and had the profoundest pity for the "Home Defense Corps" who were destined to spend the remainder of the War in England—safe perhaps, but getting most of the discomforts, and none of the thrills of the fighting line overseas or in France.

Dennis had sworn quite like a soldier when he heard where he had been ordered to; for if there was one spot in England which he would willingly have avoided, it was Mundesley and Elverstrand—partly because of the memories it invoked of Alixe Gerard, but principally because his uncle was Rector of Elverstrand, and his cousin Cicely was still keeping house for him.

The East Coast was looked upon as the most dangerous part of England now, since the raids upon Scarborough, Lowestoft, and Yarmouth, and the arrival of the air-raiders; not only Zeppelins, but airplanes. Wise people who were able to, moved away, and among them had gone the Rector's delicate wife, and the two boys who had been sent to a school in the Midlands; but Cicely stayed, felt brave and heroic, was still unmarried at the age of thirty-one, and—waiting for Dennis, as he knew now, she had been waiting for years.

Once (he still shivered to remember it) she had suggested openly that she should wait for him.

That was a long time ago, in the winter of 1915 when he

spent a Christmas leave at home with his family, and Cicely had come to spend it with them also.

Even then they had found him much older and changed. He had lost his old good spirits; and though he told them how he loved the Army life and had never been so happy, yet Cicely knew he was not; and so, on the last night before he returned to France, she had asked him what was the matter.

"Well—it's all rather depressing, isn't it?" he had answered, trying to make light of it. "Home always did depress me—and look at it outside! The wet fields, mud, and dripping trees! Oh, yes—of course, it's worse in Flanders, but there is the 'cheer,' and the friends. And, of course, leaving home and England always makes a man wonder now whether he will see it again. You can't go through a year in France and not realize the risk, you know; and the small prospect of return."

"Yes—your mother worries terribly," Cicely had said. "She never wanted you to go. I know she ought not to have tried to prevent you, and that it was your duty to join, but it is hard upon women, Dennis—upon mothers and wives." And Cicely had sighed in appropriate fashion.

Dennis recollected how he had joked about "going to the wars" and having no one to leave behind to bewail his fate if he did not come back—neither wife nor sweetheart; and he had called himself "lonely soldier."

"That is your own fault, Dennis," Cicely had said reprovingly. "You used to have heaps of friends, I remember; and lots of girls ran after you shockingly. Your mother has told me so."

It was true—but he did not want his "heaps of friends," nor the girls who ran after him "so shockingly"; he wanted *one,* and she had disappeared.

Exactly how it had gone on, he did not remember. Cicely had talked of the "old days," and their friendship as children, girl and boy, and so on, until now; calling herself his friend and confidante.

"But I expect you have forgotten all that," she had said. "So much has come between."

"No—I have not forgotten; but we were very young then. Now I'm a man—very much so."

"And I," she had smiled bravely, "am twenty-nine. Do you know, Dennis, when I was a girl I used to think you would ask me to marry you! Your mother thought so too, and would have liked it. She told me so—she thought we were so well suited to each other. But you——"

Dennis grew hot whenever he remembered that moment, and how embarrassed he felt.

"My mother never understood me," he had answered. "You're a good sort, Cicely, but—but——"

"But, of course, you don't care, Dennis—I know that." She had gazed at him reproachfully. "*I* care—and I'll wait and watch for you to come home, *always*. But I'm afraid you don't want me—do you, Dennis?"

It was then that Dennis had made the mistake of telling Cicely about Alixe Gerard. He had stammered it out: "I thought you knew how it was with me—understood about Alixe. There'll never be anyone else to me, you know."

And then Cicely had made the mistake of her life.

"Oh—Alixe Gerard!" she had exclaimed. "But she was German, Dennis—of course she was! And she has either been interned or sent back to Germany. My dear boy, even if Alixe was half-English, which I don't believe for a moment, I'm certain she was married to that German officer she was so crazy about when we were at school. I heard all about it, you see—his name was von Wehlen; did she ever mention him to you?"

"What name?" Dennis had asked with violent interest—"von Wehlen? No—I don't think she did. But she told me she was *not* married, and I believe her."

He had remembered the name. It was the strange, dark, arrogant man who came to her flat, and was introduced to

him as "Charles Weyland"—who spoke faultless English with a faint accent.

If only he knew!

He did not recollect what he had said to Cicely—how he had apologized and excused himself; but he had never spent such an uncomfortable half-hour in his life; and he remembered it when he came back to the East Coast, only five miles away from the Rectory, and was quartered there for six months.

He had to go dutifully, and call; and Cicely looked at him with reproachful eyes—and with extraordinary lack of tact asked him if he had heard anything of Alixe Gerard.

"Nothing at all," was his reply. "I have not heard from her, or of her, for nearly two and a half years now; since I joined the Army."

"Quite got over it then?" smiled his tactless cousin.

Dennis fixed his eyes on her with an odd expression.

"Oh, no—I haven't got over it," he answered; "nor am I likely to. Time makes no difference to me."

"Rather silly, that, isn't it, when she is a German, and you'll probably never see nor hear of her again. You could not have married her anyhow, Dennis; it would have broken your mother's heart."

"I should have married her if she would have had me—I did my best. And the Mater would have had to get over it."

"Well then, I hope you won't meet her again," said Cicely practically, "and that she has been sent back or interned; for it wouldn't do at all. Your mother was quite right about her. She was all very well at school, and in her own country; but over here, and dancing—no!"

Dennis shrugged his shoulders and made no reply; but he took good care to be busy after that, when invitations came for him from the Rectory, for he did not in the least want to go there, whether it was to have to listen about Alixe, or receive Cicely's tender words and attentions.

She did not know—no one knew—how all through these two and a half years the memory of Alixe had remained with him; and always with it the horrible uncertainty as to her fate, and the real reason why she had been in England that summer. It had all been so queer—her German friends, mysterious people all of them—her absences; and other things. She had always had money, beautiful clothes, and an expensively furnished flat; and the Hotel Karina, where she had danced and he had met her, was a rendezvous for foreigners before the War. The manager, a German, had been eventually interned; and all the waiters, both Germans and Austrians, had quickly disappeared. Now the hotel was closed, and a Government office—but where was Alixe?

She might have gone to Paris as she spoke of doing, or she might be in the provinces or at seaside hotels—only seaside hotels no longer employed professional dancers and entertainers; they had not sufficient guests.

That, too, was always strange when he thought about it.

Scarborough—Yarmouth—Southsea—and Portsmouth! Those were the places she visited. And it was Scarborough and Lowestoft which had been raided, while Portsmouth was the leading naval port!

Everyone knew now that England at the outbreak of war was overrun with Germans and German spies, both men and women. He had heard a lot since he had been in the Army about the carelessness of the Government in allowing, as they did, Germans to acquire property dominating naval ports—to obtain employment in post offices; even in offices where they had sole control. They had been everywhere in 1914—clerks and business men, shopkeepers, hairdressers, waiters—on the railways, the ships, and in dockyards; and even if it were true that twenty spies had been seized and shot at the very beginning of the War, and another two hundred detained and interned (so the story ran), yet even that would account for only a very few of the hundreds there must have been; and possi-

bly a good few of these, who were naturalized Englishmen, were still at liberty, and looked upon as harmless.

Lody, the master spy, had been shot, and Sir Roger Casement had been hanged at the Tower as a traitor to his country—but how many had they left behind them?

It was the end of March when Dennis Armitage was ordered to Mundesley, and found himself billeted in a first-class hotel right on the cliffs, overlooking that vast sweep of sea which stretches at this point from England to the Scheldt and Germany.

Half the hotel was reserved for officers, and he was not by any means the only one sent there for a rest; but Dennis did not care about them, nor, with one exception, did he make any friends among them.

There was one, however, like himself, undergoing a few weeks' rest (or so he said) after eighteen months as a prisoner of war in Germany; and here was formed one of those war-time friendships which have proved so steadfast, and endured through the years.

Major Lennox—a Staff Officer—was a viscount in private life, and heir to one of the oldest Earldoms in the country. He had served with the R.A.M.C., and before the War had called him had been chairman of the King's Hospital in London, where Jack Eden had been M.O. and house-surgeon.

It was through this latter fact that he and Dennis Armitage had struck up a friendship. They both knew the hospital and its staff—they knew the Café Napoleon in the West End, the Karina Hotel, the "Ritz" and the "Carlton." They had similar tastes, similar cars—both were of independent means, and had joined enthusiastically in the first few months of the War.

That they had not met before, when Dennis had seen so much of Jack Eden at the King's Hospital in 1913 and 1914, was due to the fact that Lennox had been living abroad for a year before the War broke out. He had returned to England to join the Army, and gone out to

France about the same time as Dennis—been wounded and convalescent for a long time—returned to the front and been taken prisoner within a few weeks.

Of his eighteen months in a German prison camp, he had little to tell. He admitted once, when speaking of it, that within a few minutes of his capture he was up against a wall to be shot; because, wounded in the ankle, he was unable to walk, and it was too much trouble to take wounded men prisoners.

This, however, was prevented by the fact that he had spent two or three periods of time in Germany studying music, and spoke fluent German, while the officer in command of the party which had captured the ambulance had been a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, and was clever enough to see the possible uses to which a rich man with a title, and speaking good German, could be put as a prisoner.

Lennox, however, was not a success in the rôle assigned to him; and as he was in the R.A.M.C., a non-combatant, in due time, when the exchange and repatriation of prisoners began, he was sent back to England with a batch of a couple of hundred R.A.M.C. and disabled men—not to return again to the fighting line.

"I would like to have been given charge of a British Camp for German prisoners of war," he told his fellow officers once. "I might get a bit of my own back that way. Still—I'll manage it somehow."

He was both reticent and bitter about the months he had spent in Germany, although he admitted that as far as his physical treatment went he had nothing to complain of.

He was attached to the staff of the Eastern Division now, and sometimes drove with the commandant over to a large country house twenty or thirty miles inland, which was a "camp" for German officer prisoners. Lennox called it a "hotel," and sometimes spoke rather peculiarly about the comforts and latitude allowed to the prisoners there—the parcels, letters, food, and even visitors.

"A lot of English people, too, or who call themselves English," he remarked. "Peculiar people we harbor in England, you know, considering there's a war on—Smiths who ought to be Schmidt; Harmons that should be Hermann, and so on *ad lib*. Can't think why they were allowed to change their names. Naturalized? Oh yes—but that was easy enough; and naturalizing a German doesn't make him British at heart, you know. He's still a German, with a German mentality, which is different to ours." And he added: "Thank God!"

These conversations about naturalization and change of name always worried Dennis Armitage, and brought memories; but apart from that, he liked Lennox more than any man he had known since Jack Eden; and Lennox was always entertaining, because he was here, there, and everywhere—the envy of other men who, whether they were infantry or artillery, were just "stuck," keeping fit, and training recruits.

Dennis Armitage had lost sight of Jack Eden. The latter had been home many times on leave, as he had heard from his sister Jean who wrote regularly to him; but his leave and Dennis's had never coincided for the last two years, and both had drifted, and made new friends.

Lennox said that he had heard Eden's battalion had gone to Mesopotamia.

"I hope they send me there, too, when I go back," remarked Dennis. "It will be a change."

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY in June there was a letter from Cicely one morning, asking him to come over to the Rectory, "urgently."

"I hope she won't propose to me again," said Dennis rather humorously to Lennox. "She does it periodically, and makes me feel a worm."

"No—does she?" was the other's reply. "I know her type! And it's so difficult to refuse gracefully! Can't you become engaged and warn her off? I had a cousin who was the same—a most tiresome female! But she never caught me. You had better be careful, however—they are dangerous!"

"Not to me," laughed Dennis. "It's no use!"

Lennox raised his eyebrows quizzically. It was rather a matter for curiosity and surprise among the officers here that Captain Armitage had no photographs, nor any souvenir of a girl in his billet, nor received the usual letters and parcels. He and Lennox were alike in this respect (and both were talked about for it) for almost every man, from the O.C. downward, treasured letters, souvenirs, and a portrait, and talked of someone, whether wife, mother, or sweetheart, whom he had left behind.

But Lennox, billeted in the O.C.'s house, and Dennis at the Cliff Hotel, had none.

It seemed impossible to Dennis now that he had not rushed to join the Army the first week of the War, and that he had ever for one moment thought it might not be necessary; and it irritated him to find life entirely unchanged at Elverstrand Rectory, with Cicely still doing the housekeeping, cleaning the brass at church, playing the

organ, and teaching the young woman's class in the Sunday School. It is true she sacrificed one day every week and attended at the local Red Cross hospital, where, she proudly assured him, she washed up dishes and scrubbed floors.

Dennis asked why, and could not they pay some poor woman to do that, to whom the money and work would be a godsend. But Cicely said he did not see things in the right light. Everything, even the dish-washing, must be voluntary; and it was the spirit of sacrifice and humility which counted, and "doing what one could for the War and wounded."

Jean had been nursing in the local Red Cross hospital at Longmead for twelve months, and Cicely had been rather scornful about it, because she was of opinion that Jean at twenty, and brought up as she had been with no experience, could be of less use than she, with her dish-washing and floor-scrubbing.

She inquired about Jean this afternoon, and was astonished to hear that she was now in London, nursing at a private hospital in the West End.

"I should never have thought Jean was any good at nursing," she remarked. "She does not seem serious enough."

"I was rather surprised myself," admitted Dennis, "but I think Jean has always been 'war mad.' Now, Phyllis takes no interest in it whatever—she has learned to drive a car instead, and is, I believe, a most expert motorist, and can do anything at it. Of course the Mater doesn't approve of either, but then she wouldn't. But what was it, Cicely, that you wanted to see me about? Business? Anything wrong?"

"No—nothing here." Cicely busied herself pouring out tea. "An extraordinary, and not a very pleasant, coincidence, Dennis. Who do you think I saw yesterday morning? Alixe Helm!"

"What?" exclaimed Dennis loudly. "Impossible—it couldn't have been! You were mistaken, Cicely."

"No—it's true. We were both in Elverstrand post office, and I watched her go out and enter a big car."

"But are you sure it was Alixe?"

"It was, and she saw and knew me, but did not speak nor claim acquaintance; and—well really, under the circumstances, I don't know that I want to. But when she had gone, I asked the post-mistress if she knew who the car belonged to, and what do you think——"

Dennis didn't think; and only said, "Well?"

"Mr. Meyerling, of Blecton Abbey, and she said: 'I believe the young lady is his secretary and chauffeur.' Now, what do you make of that?"

"As I don't know Mr. Meyerling of Blecton Abbey—not much."

"You have not heard of old Mr. Meyerling? He has been here a long time, and is reputed to be immensely wealthy. But—well, he was always supposed to be German. Since the War, however, he calls himself Dutch by birth, and a naturalized Englishman. He gave the Red Cross hospital to Mundesley—rented the house, and equipped it entirely at his own expense. He does a lot of things for the camp and our soldiers too—owns a lot of land, and grows enormous quantities of stuff which he sells cheap, or gives away."

"He sounds a very pleasant gentleman. But get on about Alixe—I want to hear."

"Well, Dennis, don't you think it is rather strange that Alixe Helm, who undoubtedly was, and is, German, after disappearing for nearly three years should suddenly reappear as secretary to a man who has always been believed to be German too? It's more than coincidence, you know."

"I doubt if it was Alixe you saw," said Dennis coldly. "But even if it was, I cannot see that being secretary to a man whom you yourself describe as being loyal and

charitable, who has lived here for years and is well known, can be regarded as suspicious. Strange coincidence, if you like, that you and I and Alixe should all meet here again after three years; but nothing else."

"I call it suspicious. Mr. Meyerling is, I am sure, German."

"Possibly; but you say he has done all sorts of things for our men—not to speak of the hospital—which does not look as if his sympathies were German. And even that does not affect Alixe one way or the other—if, as I say, it was she."

"Oh, it was—I know that; and you can easily find out."

"You may be sure I shall."

"And will you report it then? I think you ought."

"What on earth for? Don't be silly—what possible harm could she be doing? And surely you know that Alixe must have her papers of identity, and all that, in order, or she would not be free. Do you think I am going to hunt her down just because she is half-German?"

"I never said anything about 'hunting her down'." Cicely flushed. "But I thought it was the loyal duty of every citizen these days to report anything suspicious, and to try and protect his country from——"

"From what?" asked Dennis suddenly.

But that, Cicely did not answer. She seemed rather annoyed at his brusque attitude, but not half so annoyed as he was over her "silly suspicions," as he called them, and her damned interference.

He left as soon as he could after tea, pleading "duty," and drove away thankfully, deciding it would be a jolly long time before he went again—especially if her astounding news was true.

He had almost given up hope now of meeting Alixe again; because, however much against his will it was, he could not help believing that she was German; and he had thought she must have left the country.

The news was, therefore, doubly welcome, for it told

him that his fears in this direction were unfounded. He recollected Blecton Abbey, now that Cicely had called it to mind—it stood about half a mile back from the cliffs in a wooded park between Mundesley and Elverstrand. There was a lane leading to the gates from the main road to Cromer, and he remembered faintly now that he had been told it belonged to a Dutchman.

He decided to drive as near as possible and have a look at it; but even now he scarcely believed that it was Alixe whom Cicely had seen.

It was simply impossible for him to go up to an unknown man's house and inquire for his secretary, or chauffeur, or whatever (and whoever) she might be. Not even in war-time could a British officer do such a thing, however much he wished to find out; and Dennis puzzled his brain for days without finding an answer to the problem.

He haunted the villages (particularly the post offices) and glared at all the occupants of private cars—but with no result.

Then, at the end of a week or two, he was on the cliffs between Mundesley and Trimmingham. They had been practicing with Lewis guns all the afternoon, and he was left to see the last of the men and the guns on the march back to Mundesley, and follow them in his car which was waiting for him on the road.

It was a hot July afternoon, and between where he stood and the road was a field of corn; red now with poppies which reminded him of the old song Alixe had liked and sung when they were here together three years ago:

"Oh, heart of my heart, where red poppies are born,
I am waiting for you 'mid the hush of the corn."

Beyond the edge of the cliff, less than a hundred yards away, was a shining vista of blue sea as far as the eye could travel. Not a ship in sight—not a cloud in the sky; and how impossible it seemed to him now, in this peaceful countryside, that there was fighting and killing going on

across that shining, rippleless sea—blood and agony. That out there, in the North Sea between England and Germany, were horrible death-dealing mines, and ships carrying torpedoes—German cruisers perhaps ready to attack the British coast; airships, airplanes, and everything that the most devilish mind of man could create for killing and maiming.

And all these men—these jolly boys (for such they seemed)—of the new army, were all being solidly trained to kill; to shoot quick and straight, to bayonet as became a proper soldier, and to account for the largest number of the enemy.

He shivered in the hot sunshine, and turned back to thoughts of Alixe, and that summer, three years ago.

Then he became aware that a girl was coming across from the edge of the cliffs, as if she had just ascended one of the several little paths between Trimmingham and Mundesley which led down to the beach. Oddly enough, however, there was no real path on this part of the coast—only steep, rough, dangerous descents; for here was the highest point of the cliffs for miles.

Still, there she was, and she had not been there five minutes ago, nor had she come from the lane where now his men were waiting for him to give the word of command to start back to the camp. She was coming across to him, wearing a lavender-colored dress, a hat to match, but of a much darker shade, and gray shoes and stockings; and suddenly Dennis stood transfixed—forgetting his men, forgetting everything—while his heart leaped for sheer joy as he recognized her.

She was not looking at him, for her eyes were on the ground, and her thoughts obviously far away; she would even have passed him if he had not stepped impulsively forward.

"Alixe!" he exclaimed. "It *is* Alixe!"

She started and turned, then stood still, staring at him in bewilderment—almost as if he were a ghost.

"You haven't forgotten me, Alixe!"

She drew a deep breath, but did not smile.

"No—it's Dennis Armitage, isn't it? But you look so different—I never saw you in khaki, you know. And I never expected to meet you here—I have not seen your name, nor heard of you, for all this time, and—Oh, you aren't quartered here, are you?"

"Yes, I am." He stared back at her in surprise, for she did not sound exactly delighted at the meeting. There was dismay in her voice, and something akin to fear.

"And isn't it quite the proper place for us to meet?" he added, forcing a smile, and holding out his hand. "We met once at Cromer—I don't know how or why—and you said you liked the idea: 'On the cliffs by the sea, where red poppies are born.' There are plenty of poppies about now! Are you not going to shake hands, Alixe, and be pleased to see me? At least flatter my masculine vanity, and say that you are, even if you are not!"

"But of course I am." She smiled now, and slipped her hand into his. " I am pleased, not only to see you, but to know that you are well and whole, and have come through all right, when so many men—haven't. Tell me —where are you quartered? What is your regiment? And how is it that you are still in England?"

He told her in a few words—Artillery—Mundesley—and on "rest duty" from France. She listened, nodded, and drew her brows together in a queer pucker.

"And you," said Dennis eagerly. "I hear you are living at Blecton Park—or is it Blecton Abbey—with a Mr. Meyerling, a Dutchman, as his secretary and chauffeur. I heard this from my cousin Cicely who saw you in Elverstrand post office one day, and recognized you."

"Oh, yes—I saw Cicely," answered Alixe, "but I did not think she would want to claim acquaintance with me. It's bad enough, you see, to be suspected of being a German, but I am living also with a suspected person, and

that makes it worse! But, of course, I had no idea you were here. What are you doing on the cliffs?"

"We were machine-gun practicing, and—good God, I forgot—my men are waiting for my command to start back, and it's teatime! I'll holler to the sergeant—he'll take them along; and I'll drive you wherever you are going. My car is waiting in the lane."

"What—the same Rolls-Royce?" She walked beside him. "How strange it all seems!"

"Strange and beautiful," answered Dennis. "But it's a new car—I bought it when I returned from France in the spring; thought I deserved it after sixteen months in the trenches."

He called to the sergeant, and the latter came up, took his command, and marched the men away, while Dennis walked with Alixe to his car.

"I had no idea you were a gunner," she remarked. "Do you like it—are you glad, now, that you joined?"

"I should have had to join, anyway, so it's a good job I did it voluntarily. Yes—I liked it in France, but I've been pretty fed-up since I came to Mundesley three months ago. Now, since I have met you again, I don't care if I spend the remainder of the war here. All, or nearly all, of us officers, are back from the front, you know, and waiting to be sent out again."

"I know," quietly. "The East Coast is full of such—and the latest recruits to the conscript army as well. I told you you didn't realize what it was going to be, didn't I? I knew that there would have to be conscription, and —it came!"

"Yes—you did," admitted Dennis in a peculiar tone. "And what is this man like who employs you, Alixe? I have not seen him."

"He is old," Alixe smiled, "and more or less an invalid. A Dutchman by birth, but naturalized British. He has done very much for the country round here; perhaps you have heard? The Red Cross hospital at Mundesley, the

camp, and all the things he sends. Yes, indeed, he is most generous and charitable."

"But that does not account for his employing you as chauffeur. Why not a man?"

"There are so few men available now—women have to take all the jobs. And Mr. Meyerling does not think it would be right to employ a man—anyway, just at present. Besides, he wants a secretary—he does really, with all his business with Holland, and all his charities. Oh, I am very busy, I assure you!" And she laughed.

"But you are a dancer by profession," pointed out Dennis, "so how can you be a secretary? Can you type—write English well? Drive a car?"

"Yes, to all of them," she laughed—something of her old laugh. "But I couldn't get an engagement to dance now if I tried, and there are no shows like there used to be at the 'Karina.' You see—I was always believed to be either German or Austrian. Well, I had no reason to deny it before the War, had I? For it was not a crime then. But that was quite enough to prevent me getting any more engagements, or anything at all to do; and then I heard of this. Well—I took it, and I am admirably suited for it, because I speak foreign languages. And, of course, Mr. Meyerling does not mind what I am, as he is not British himself, you see."

"Quite," answered Dennis dryly. "It seems doubtful if he is not a German, from what I have heard; and he has been here some years and is pretty well known."

"He is very British in his sympathies then, and very harmless." Alixe looked straight ahead. "For he is old, and as I tell you, almost an invalid."

"Anyhow, leave him alone and let's talk of ourselves. How long have you been here, and when and how am I to see you again?"

Alixe considered the questions for a minute, while they walked to the car to the distant strains of "Pack Up Your Troubles" from down the road.

"I've been here two months—Oh, then I came after you! How long I shall stay I don't know; it depends upon how I like it. But I think it will be too cold when the summer is over. You can come and see me at Blecton, *once,* if you like—Mr. Meyerling will be delighted, for he loves British soldiers, officers and men alike. But, of course, I could not possibly meet you anywhere here—as we met at Cromer, for example—it would not do!"

"And I don't think I'm keen on coming to meet your Dutchman," observed Dennis without enthusiasm. "Still, if that's the only way to see you, I'll do it. You don't know, Alixe, how I've tried to trace you. Every leave I've had, I've been looking at your flat, and the 'Karina'."

"Closed—a Government office. What a lovely car, Dennis! What on earth did you want to find me for? I told you I was leaving London for the winter."

"Three winters have passed since then. Where have you spent them all?"

"All over the place; but in 1914 I was in London for the New Year after all. How nice you look in khaki, Dennis; I always knew you would, and was sorry I could not see you. You are a Captain—well done! Perhaps you'll be a General yet! Yes, you can drive me as far as Mundesley village, if you will; I left our car at the garage there for a little adjustment, and walked up on the cliffs while it was being done. I must collect it, and get back."

"A rather long walk," remarked Dennis casually. "I thought you seemed to have come up from the beach. Right-ho—hop in, and I'll drive you to the end of the world if you like."

"The village will do for today, thank you," answered Alixe, getting in. "I am a busy person, you see, and although I am glad to see you again, I must get back."

"Yes—you look busy!" He started the car, and they glided down the lane. "But why, if you have been in this part for two months, haven't you been to see Cicely? You know your way, and she and my uncle would be most

pleased to meet you again, you know. They are alone at the Rectory now, for my aunt has gone to her people in Yorkshire. She was so affected by the fear of an air-raid or bombardments that she was downright ill, and the doctor said she must go away altogether from this part; and the boys are at school at Bedford."

"And do you think they would really be pleased to see me, Dennis?" asked Alixe, falling immediately into the habit of calling him "Dennis" again as she had always done. "Cicely believes I am German, does she not? She knew me as Alixe Helm in Germany."

"Still, that does not make you so, does it?" argued Dennis. "Let me drive you over to the Rectory, will you?"

"No, thank you." She was positive and unhesitating. "I do not somehow think that they would care about the acquaintance, and for my own part, I do not go out much. I am busy at Blecton Park, and have little time for society. And so," she smiled at him, "you are not married to Cicely yet? I almost expected by this time that you would be."

"Then you expected wrong," retorted Dennis. "I am not."

"I still think Cicely would have said 'yes'."

"Said 'yes'! My word she would, and a lot more than 'yes'. She would have done the asking, accepting, and the whole damn thing, as I know now! But since you turned me down and vanished, I've given up any idea of matrimony, and that's that. I've just been waiting, Alixe—waiting and hoping to find you again some day when this rotten old war is ended. And now I have found you, I'll not let you go again in a hurry, I can tell you!"

Alixe smiled a little, her eyes far ahead on the fields of corn and poppies; but she did not answer.

"It's very beautiful here just now," she remarked instead. "The flowers and the corn, the cliffs and the sea. But all the trenches and barbed wire entanglements between here and Cromer, Elverstrand and Mundesley, don't seem real or right, do they?"

"Very real, and very necessary," answered Dennis. "Further along the coast, the cliffs are entirely closed except to the military, you know; and you have to get a military pass even to drive through that area on the main road. There are too many underground passages and caves belonging to the old smuggler days. Why, a small army could be accommodated in some of them. But the coast-guards watch them now, and it is advisable for anyone to walk, and remain where they can be plainly seen. There is a lot of firing constantly going on round the cliffs too—but I expect you know that as well as I do."

"Yes," said Alixe briefly. "The garage, Dennis, please. Nowhere else—I don't want to be seen with you."

"What? Why on earth—oh, don't be silly! They'll see us often enough before we're through."

"I don't think so. It must not be—for your own sake, Dennis. I—" she hesitated a second—"I am glad we have met—I liked you, and it's nice to see you again looking so fit and well. You may even come and call upon me at Blecton if you like, as I have said, but—" she shook her head "—that's all, Dennis. You must not interfere with me or my work—you must not try to meet me. And, above all, you must allow no one to talk about us."

"My word, you do lay down the law!" He laughed, and turned the car down towards Mundesley village, which lay in the hollow behind the cliffs. "Have you grown strong-minded, Alixe?"

"But I mean it." She frowned, and her voice grew slightly impatient. "We must not be seen together. You may think me silly, but I know what these camps are like —I have lived near a military camp before this summer. and if—if we were talked about, I should lose my job, do you see? And it is a good job to me, and important. Do you understand now? It is not as it was when we were in London, and I was free to do as I wished."

"I quite understand"—frankly. "And naturally I should not mention your name in camp, nor in the officers' mess;

but I cannot see the necessity for secrecy, all the same. We are old friends, and finding you like this after three years, you need not start lecturing at once. Hang it all—don't you want to see me?"

"Yes, of course," replied Alixe; but her voice had an unconvincing note in it, and she looked worried and uneasy, instead of happy and enthusiastic as he thought she might have been.

"Can I come and call at Blecton Park, then?" he asked.

"Yes—I'll let you know which day. Don't come unexpectedly or you may find me out. I will tell Mr. Meyerling about meeting you, and he will certainly ask you to come; but, of course, you quite understand that I am only his secretary, don't you? And, please—put me down outside the garage."

"What a lot of things I have to understand and do," laughed Dennis, too happy to mind. "When am I to come—tomorrow?"

"I said I'd let you know."

"I don't believe you want me a bit!"

She smiled—her odd, inscrutable smile of mystery.

"But—of course," she said as she shook hands. "If you are good, I shall want you. But we are very busy, you understand."

"More things to understand," murmured Dennis as he pulled up the car.

CHAPTER THREE

"DO you know a place near here called Blecton Park?" asked Dennis Armitage casually.

He was dining with his Colonel, Lennox, and another man at the Colonel's house.

"On the road to Blecton village—through Trimmingham," he added. "Belongs to a Dutchman, I am told."

It was Lennox who looked up and fixed his eyes upon the younger man—strange dark eyes they were, that looked him through and through.

"German," he answered quietly, "not Dutch. Naturalized, of course. Yes—I know it."

"Quite all right, isn't it? My cousins at Elverstrand were speaking of him the other day. I suppose it must be all right, but it seems odd that Germans should have settled like this on our East Coast."

"Oh, he is supposed to be harmless." It was still Lennox who spoke as if he were the authority. "We watch him, you may be sure; but he seems a genial old bean."

"I understand he is rather fond of the British Army," went on Dennis, "and invites them wholesale to his place to fêtes and garden-parties and so on. Is that correct?"

"Not since I have been here, but I have heard of it. Perhaps the Colonel can tell us."

"He has asked the men up to the park," said the Colonel easily. "Several different parties, I believe, have gone, and they have had cricket matches and a good spread. I have not met him myself, however, so I cannot pass an opinion. I am told he is all right—he has lived around

here for twenty years or more. If you are invited to go, Captain Armitage, there is no reason why you should not."

Dennis said that he had not received any invitation, but his cousin at Elverstrand Rectory had mentioned it—that was all!

"Everybody who isn't pure British is under suspicion at present," put in Lennox carelessly. "I dare say if I were heard speaking German, as I can speak it, about here, I too should be suspected immediately. They tried hard to make out that I must be half-German when I was there, because of my unfortunate name, and that I could speak their apology for a language."

The Colonel asked what his name was, and Lennox replied: "Rothenöhr," which came down from an ancestor whom, regretfully, he had to admit, had been German. The conversation then turned on ancestors and names, and gradually slipped away from Blecton Park. Only Dennis Armitage, at all times more astute than he was given credit for, knew that Lennox had skilfully maneuvered it away for some purpose of his own.

. . . . .

For a week he heard and saw nothing of Alixe Gerard, although he wrote to her, and also left his card at Blecton Park in a vain endeavor to see her there.

After that he received a note in her handwriting, asking him to tea one afternoon; which invitation he promptly accepted, not only because it gave him an opportunity of meeting Alixe, but also out of curiosity to see the house and the "Dutchman."

Both were disappointing. The house inside was old-fashioned and heavily furnished in decidedly Dutch style, and the handsome, courteous, white-haired old gentleman was certainly anything but a person to be suspected, especially as he could only walk slowly with the help of a manservant nearly as ancient as himself, and a stick; or else propel himself along in a wheel-chair.

They had tea in what they called the "garden" room, which led on to an open, covered terrace, and, beyond, to the garden—a plain green expanse surrounded by trees and bushes so as to be completely shut in, and somewhat gloomy on a summer day.

His hostess, he found, was the Dutchman's sister, an expansive lady with a double chin and double chest. Alixe played "daughter of the house" rather than secretary, and Dennis found himself the guest of honor.

"Lovely place you have here," he remarked, being polite, "but rather lonely, especially in winter, I should think. What are those ruins I can just see through the trees at the end of the garden?"

"Oh, those are the ruins of Blecton Abbey," answered Alixe. "It's very old, you know—this house is about two hundred years old, but the Abbey is nearly a thousand. Yes, really twelfth century, isn't it, Mr. Meyerling? The ruins are most interesting too, but one cannot explore them now, as they are crumbling, and quite unsafe—is it not so, Mr. Meyerling?" And she looked at the latter for corroboration, and (was it?) approbation.

"Yes, yes—that is so," said he. "But I have not been in England so long, though there are many English in this part of the country, and also in the Fens, who are descended from the Dutch who settled here during the wars. But I came only twenty years ago,"—he smiled at his visitor—"you see, it is so convenient for Harwich, by which, before this devastating war, I could reach Antwerp and Rotterdam, where my business is conducted."

"You prefer England to Holland then?" asked Dennis.

The Dutchman spread out his hands—fat, white hands, with a huge signet ring on one finger. He smiled on.

"It is my business, you understand."

It all brought back to Dennis a remembrance of Alixe's flat in London. Elizabeth, who had "business" which took her once to Brussels—now he could wonder why!

And Otto Wertheim, who traveled constantly between London and Berlin—"on business."

Abruptly he turned to Alixe again, and asked her:

"Do you ever hear anything of your friend, Miss Piper, whom I used to meet at your flat?"

"No—she returned to Germany, I think," replied Alixe.

"And your friend, Otto, whom I hated at sight, and was always jealous of—where is he?"

"That also I do not know—I have lost touch with all of them. But Otto was an old friend—you did not ever need to be jealous of him, Dennis."

"No, I suppose not." He set down his cup. "Will you take me around, and show me your ruins, Alixe? I'd like so much to see them."

"Yes, certainly, if Mr. Meyerling approves." She looked at her employer. "We will walk round the garden, and then I must see you off, for I have work to do."

. . . . .

There was little to see in the garden, however, for owing to the shortage of gardeners, the place was not well kept as to flowers and lawns. Alixe explained that Mr. Meyering considered that, at present, gardeners should attend to the growing of fruit and vegetables instead of flowers, and therefore this part of the grounds was somewhat neglected.

Dennis did not care in the least, however; all he wanted was to be with Alixe, who was as elusive as a fairy, and impossible to talk seriously to.

They came round by the ruins, which Dennis did want to see—huge arches of ancient, ivy-covered stone, broken and crumbling with age—together with the remnant of the cloisters, the eastern front, and the watch-tower.

"No—we never take our visitors among them," Alixe said; "they are dangerous."

"I can't see how or why they should be." Dennis

looked unconvinced by this statement. "Are there vaults below, or passages?"

"I expect so. There is a passage into the house which opens into a store-room, but, of course, it is disused. I tried to get along it once, when they were all out. These funny old houses are very interesting, are they not?"

"Oh, rather! I'd like to explore it myself, and the ruins too." He looked at Alixe, but she was staring ahead.

"No chance of going through the ruins, or passage?"

"I'll try, one day. You must come to dinner and make friends with my beautiful old gentleman—he is beautiful, isn't he?" with a swift smile. "But," she went on before he could speak, "all the same, these are strange times, Dennis, are they not? And it is as well not to—to talk."

"Yes, I quite understand, and I shouldn't," answered Dennis dryly. "I scarcely know why, but there is something peculiar about this place in spite of your 'beautiful old gentleman'."

"He is so kind, too," murmured Alixe. "You wouldn't believe how sweet they are to me. I should not even have said what I did to you, for I know his sympathies and loyalty are absolutely British."

"I wonder! Why do you stay here, Alixe?"

"Why not?" There was a rustic seat set beneath the high elm trees, and she sat down, making room for him beside her. "I am well paid, and I have a comfortable home, a car to drive, and an easy job."

Dennis took the seat she offered, and looked at her thoughtfully. "Still—people suspect, you know, and it does you no good."

"Oh, my dear—not in his own grounds!" She shook her head at him with a smile. "Of course you are different—I understand that; but as for me, it's not my place to suspect anybody, because I'm a mongrel myself. I suppose that is why I live here and like it. Why, it wouldn't worry me to live with Germans!"

"It would worry me considerably if you did! And as

for an easy job—a car to drive and a home—I'd give you all that, Alixe, if you'd marry me. I wish you would before I return to the front, and let me feel safe about you. I'd like to leave you this time, as my wife. Won't you, Alixe?"

She looked at him with beautiful, blank, mysterious eyes.

"Do you mean you still want to marry me?"

"Of course I do—I told you I should come back to you, and that there would never be anyone else. Didn't I," he laughed, rather ashamed now, "claim to be your 'knight'?"

"Yes, of course; but I thought you would have forgotten all that nonsense. I still have your beautiful brooch, but I do not wear it here—it is so valuable it would be out of place. Have you my handkerchief? Oh, Dennis!" She laughed. "How romantic! And I thought romance was dead—that the war had killed it."

"On the contrary," said Dennis, "the war has re-created it. We don't somehow mind being romantic and sentimental these days, because every man is. But all this talk of romance is not answering me. Once again, Alixe, will you marry me?"

"And once again, Dennis—No!" Her fingers slipped into his hand and pressed it. "It's just as impossible as ever. I don't want to marry anybody, but you can still be my knight if you like."

"That I shall always be, I hope," answered Dennis gently. "But it's not very satisfying—I'd like a bit more."

"There isn't any more." She sighed impatiently. "Why can't you understand and be friends—why can't you help me now that we have met again, instead of tormenting me?"

"Just because I am a man, and I love you."

"Yes, so you say." She tapped the grass impatiently with her foot. "But if you do, why—when you know

that anything else is impossible—won't you be just friends?"

"Would you be satisfied with platonic friendship then, Alixe?"

"Yes—oh, yes. That's what I want."

"I shouldn't then; and sometimes I think I can't wait much longer. I don't know, now that I have found you again, which is the worse—when I am here with you and want you in my arms, or when I was away from you and you haunted me day and night until it was torture. You're a strange person—you are so cold—and I don't think you realize what you make me suffer."

"Why love me then?" asked Alixe. "I didn't want you to, nor try to make you."

"Ask God, Who created us man and woman. Perhaps He knows why—I don't. But I know I had to. Is it quite hopeless, Alixe?"

"Yes," said Alixe simply, and she stood up. "Come along, let us walk back to your car, please."

"But you will let me see you again?"

"I will let you know when it is possible."

. . . . .

Although it was a fine, warm summer, there were almost no visitors on that part of the East Coast; and Cromer and Sheringham were empty, for the majority of people shunned it as the most dangerous part of England, where raids, either by sea or air, might occur any day.

Also, there was very little accommodation for visitors; most of the hotels and houses, from Yarmouth to Cromer, being occupied by the military.

There was the Cliff Hotel at Mundesley, where Dennis Armitage and a dozen more officers were billeted, and another small private hotel; but even in August these were not full; and the cliffs and beach presented an extraordinarily deserted appearance except for a handful of soldiers who bathed in the early mornings, and for the

different sections of men who paraded, practiced, drilled, and camped on the top of the flat cliffs, at different times and parts, every day.

Between Mundesley and Trimmingham, however, beyond the trenches and the barbed wire entanglements, was a mile or so of gorse, scrub, and heather right to the cliff edge, so that maneuvers were impossible there, and it was as deserted as imaginable. The coastguards patroled it from time to time, but even that seemed scarcely necessary, for the top of the cliff could be seen from the lane which at that point rose in a hill before dipping into Trimmingham village.

And, driving over the hill one afternoon, Dennis saw Alixe Gerard on the cliffs, walking near the edge.

He had been to Blecton Park to ask if she would accompany him for a drive, and the ancient manservant had told him that Miss Gerard was out—he did not know where.

Dennis stopped the car at the end of the lane which ran up to the cliff, and walked over the turf, coming up silently behind her as she stood there looking down.

"Contemplating suicide?" he questioned. "You are very near the edge, and you shouldn't look over like that —it's really not safe."

Alixe started violently, for she had not heard his footsteps on the grass, nor dreamed of his approach; and he seized her by the arm, and dragged her back forcibly.

"For God's sake, Alixe, you might have fallen over! Do come away from the edge!"

"You shouldn't have startled me so!" She was almost angry, and flushed as she faced him. "Why didn't you call out as you came—I hate people who creep about!"

"I didn't creep—I saw you from the end of the lane, and I didn't think you would mind me joining you. I've been to Blecton Park——"

"What? Dennis, I told you you were not to go there, and you must not follow me about—I won't have it! If

you do this again, I won't speak to you for the rest of the time I'm here. Do you hear? Leave me alone!"

Dennis's face was blank with astonishment. He explained rather stiffly that he only went to call, and see if she was free to come out—and he hadn't followed her.

"No, of course not. I'm sorry," said Alixe, her mood changing just as suddenly. "But I hate to be followed and watched when I don't know it. I love these cliffs, especially the lonely parts where the soldiers don't come. I look for wild flowers, and other things; and there are paths—funny little narrow places where I'm sure no one could walk. It is the most fascinating part of the coast I've seen."

"I can't say I found it so until I met you." Dennis smiled, his good humor quickly restored. "And why are you so keen upon paths?"

"I don't know, but they look adventurous." She peered over the edge again at a path which apparently commenced about twenty feet down.

"I wonder if one could drop over! It would be safe enough, I fancy, if one didn't miss one's footing."

"And if you did, it would be a grand finale," dryly. "And you'd soon go 'West'. Why want to drop over, when there is a proper path, and steps, half a mile westwards towards Mundesley?"

"That wouldn't be the same." She turned, and began to walk away. "When do you return to France, Dennis?"

"I really don't know—October, I expect. They said six months; but I don't know that it will be France again—it may be the eastern front next time. Why, are you anxious to get rid of me?"

She did not answer, but continued to walk, and he had to follow her.

"In a hurry? You always are! Can't we sit down? It's not going to rain, and no one is waiting for you,

for I asked, and the servant said that they were out in the car."

"Yes, I know; but I must go back all the same. I have work to do."

"How long are you going to stay here?"

"I don't know yet. No—I won't sit down." She drew her brows together in an impatient little frown. "You will only begin to make love to me if I do, and —and I hate that sort of thing. I'm sorry, but I've said it now. I like you as a friend, Dennis, but when you begin to talk about love, and—and marriage, I don't like you a bit."

"Yes, I've gathered that already," answered Dennis quietly. "Is it the man I met at your flat in 1914?"

"Otto?"

"No, I don't mean him. The other man—Charles something—I only saw him once; he came unexpectedly, and you went as white as a sheet, and looked scared to death. I guessed it then—it was the way he looked at you, and you at him. I am right, am I not?"

"That is a question I cannot answer," said Alixe; and again, as he noticed, she looked white.

"Are you married to him? You told me years ago that you were not—but Cicely declares you are."

"No, I am not married, Dennis; but I am not free."

They walked a little in silence. Then:

"He was a German, of course," remarked Dennis.

"Yes, he was; but you forget that I also—they are my people in a sense, you know."

"Would you return to Germany, then, if the war ended now? Would you marry a German?"

"I shall never marry anyone," said Alixe quietly. "And how can one say what one would do?"

She stood leaning against the tall coastguard signal, looking out to sea. "If you knew all about me, Dennis, you wouldn't want to marry me—you would be sorry you ever met me again. Can't you understand? Even

if I cared for you, I should still say no—and always 'no'."

"If you cared for me, and you were not married, then I shouldn't take 'no'—I'd run away with you!" He laughed a little, but she saw uneasily that he was serious, and meant it.

She played back to him. "But then—even then—I should not marry you. It would shock your British morals, but it would end there."

"It would begin there," he corrected; "that's where you are mistaken. You think I am like these other men (and I dare say there have been plenty in your life) who have fallen in love with your beauty and charm. So did I—at first; but it's a much deeper thing now, and something which will last all my life. I love the real you, which I seldom see; and I don't only want you for a week-end leave or a honeymoon—I want you always as a companion, and my wife. Can't you understand? Or do you care for your German to the exclusion of everything else?"

"No, that was quite different," said Alixe gravely. "And—please don't tempt me, Dennis; it's impossible. If you are untemptable as a perfect 'knight' should be—then, so am I. We'll be friends, or you must leave me entirely alone."

"Then you don't care for me," persisted Dennis; "for, if you did, you would realize that neither course is possible; and, too, you would clear up the mystery about yourself and this German—you would tell me the truth, and why you would not marry me even if you cared. And, as you know, Alixe, that day at your flat in London in 1914, when I said good-by to you, I thought you did care a bit."

"Sometimes I have thought so, too." She shook her head. "And then—I don't like it, because, you see, I mustn't. But I don't really—not as you mean. I love the little boy in you, Dennis. Perhaps you don't know

it, but every man has a little boy inside him; and some, like you, have not outgrown him. I love to make you happy, and see you smile—I do still, and I hate to—to make you cross and miserable as I have to; but I think my love is only maternal, or else you are the type of man who appeals to the best and most womanly feelings of even a girl like I am. I'd like to be always with you —to comfort you, and look after you."

"Alixe, you do care!" He took a step forward as if to take her in his arms. "You couldn't talk like that if you didn't!" He caught her arm just as once before he had grasped at her on the sea-shore, almost below where they were standing, and again his fingers came in contact with a heavy gold bracelet she still wore. It was only a little thing, but it brought a sudden recollection, and with it, an unusual irritation.

"So you still wear your bangle! Who gave it to you?"

"I can't tell you, Dennis. Let me go."

"Your German, of course—they are his initials, are they not?—C.W. Yes, I remember, Alixe. What is he to you?"

"Don't ask me questions. I won't answer, and I don't like it. Let me go at once!"

Dennis let her go, and for a few seconds they stood and looked at each other. He was furious now at her coldness and utter lack of confidence, tired of the mystery, and suddenly convinced of the reason of it.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I'll leave you alone in future. You are right—it would be best."

He did not even say good-by or shake hands, but saluted, turned, and walked rapidly away across the cliff.

CHAPTER FOUR

RETURNING from duty one evening about a week later, Dennis was met in the hall by the manageress.

"There's a young lady waiting to see you, Captain Armitage," she said. "She is sitting in the drawing-room."

Immediately Dennis's thoughts flew to Alixe; but he had heard nothing of her for over a week, and could not think of any reason why she should come to the hotel. And if it was not Alixe, it must be Cicely.

"She did not give her name," added the manageress. "She has a case with her, as if she has come a journey, but—I'm afraid we are full up."

She looked at him peculiarly as she spoke. He wondered why, and strode away to the drawing-room. It could not be either Alixe or Cicely.

When he entered the room, he saw that it was neither —it was Jean.

She was sitting by the window, looking out and doing nothing, and she turned a scared face to him as he came in.

"Oh, Dennis! It is I——!"

"Why, it's Jean! Whatever is the matter? And why are you here? Have you come from London, or home? Is anything wrong? The Mater——"

He came across in a few strides, and she stood up with the chair between them.

"No, mother is all right. I haven't been home for a month. I've come from London."

"Yes, I understood you were nursing in a London hospital. Then, why are you here?"

"Because I don't know where else to go—nor to whom.

Shut the door, Dennis—I must speak to you alone. I'm sorry to have come to you, but——" She broke off and watched him go to the door. Then she re-seated herself, and pulled off her hat as if she was faint.

"Whatever is the matter?" demanded Dennis. "Jean, you look ill! For Heaven's sake tell me what is wrong!"

Jean did look ill. She was ghastly white and shivering, so that it was not difficult to believe her when she replied:

"I'm going to have a baby—that's why I daren't go home. Mother would half-kill me if she knew, and I don't know what on earth to do, nor where to go. You've always been good to me, Dennis, and I thought perhaps, if I told you, you'd understand."

"Good God!" exclaimed Dennis. "You! Why—you only seem a child yourself, Jean! Are you married?"

Jean shook her head. "Oh, no—I'm not married."

"Then—" he felt a little dazed—"how on earth could such a thing happen? I mean—you—you have always been so well looked after."

"It happened in the usual way, Dennis." She smiled pitifully. "There is only one way, isn't there? I suppose I was wicked—mother would say so, anyhow. But it didn't seem wicked at the time; only—I didn't know it was so easy. We went on, and then he had to go back to the front, and I found out what had happened."

"Yes, yes, but where have you been to meet whoever the man is, and to be in such a position," cried the distracted Dennis, shocked unspeakably by the news. "The Mater wrote to me that you had left the Red Cross hospital at Longmead to go and help at one in London—she knew the people, I think. Wasn't that so?"

"Yes, I was supposed to go and live there, but I never did, although I've been helping up to the last month. I've been living with one of the nurses at a hostel, but I have had to leave there now, and I can't, won't, go home! And Jack, I tell you, is in Gallipoli——"

"Jack! You don't mean to tell me—Jack Eden!"

"Yes, it couldn't be anybody else. I have hardly spoken to another man. Dennis, do you know where he is? I've not heard from him for weeks, and I'm terrified. Supposing—he has been killed!"

Dennis was not listening. He had turned, and walked away to the window, trying to collect his thoughts, Jack Eden, his friend—and Jean, his little sister. Oh! this war—this war! It seemed to send people mad, and to create ridiculous, impossible positions! Jack Eden was not—never had been—a beast. He could not have done a thing like this, and gone back to France and left her! There must be some mistake.

Yet, turning to look at Jean, he knew there was no mistake; she would not have come all this way to him if there had been any such likelihood. Jean knew.

"Why didn't he marry you?" he asked, sick at heart.

"He meant to," answered Jean quietly, "and, of course, he will when—if he comes home. But there wasn't time—he was recalled unexpectedly."

"Then he—you both might have waited. I didn't know he had been home this summer—he never let me know. When was it?"

"At Easter. Nobody knew but myself—we went away for a week. I was supposed to be at Lady Temple's hospital, but, of course, I wasn't. I only lived there a month altogether. Then I went with another nurse to a hotel. But now, you see, I can't go on nursing—they would not have me when—when it's obvious what is the matter with me."

"But what on earth can I do?" cried Dennis, uncertain whether to be more disgusted than sympathetic, or vice versa. "They are full up here, but I dare say if I tell them you are my sister, and you register as Miss Armitage, they will put you up for the night. But, anyway, the hotel is full of men, and I don't suppose you will want to stay here long—I don't know where you can go—unless, what about Cicely? Why not go there?"

"Oh, Dennis, I couldn't!" Jean shook her head. "Cicely is so—so good; you know what I mean, and she'd never understand."

"I don't myself." He had to say it then. "You are young and innocent, but Jack Eden knew what he was doing. He is a doctor, and what he does not know about women I'll bet isn't worth knowing. My God, I would not have believed he could be such a blackguard! If you had been a different sort of girl—but you, a lady, and my sister! Oh, it's damnable! You'll have to go home, Jean."

"I will not!" Suddenly Jean flashed into passionate anger. "Dennis, it's mother's fault, too, as well as mine! She ought to have taught us properly and told us, but she never did—she always said we mustn't speak, or even think of such things; and I tell you that idea is wrong—wrong and wicked! Girls should be told, and taught for their own protection. I didn't know! I tell you, I never knew——"

"I understand—she was always like that," gloomily. "Have you any money, Jean?"

"No, I spent the last of it coming here. Mother sent me some while I was living in London, but, of course, I had to use all that for my board at the hotel. I thought perhaps you—I hate to bother you like this, but what can I do? Jack would send me money, of course, if he knew; but——"

"I wonder if he would," thought Dennis oddly, "or if Jean is not the only one!" And then aloud: "You had better stay here for tonight, anyway, and tomorrow I will see what I can do. I should have thought Cicely——"

"Oh, Cicely!" Jean laughed drearily. "I've never forgotten—we had a servant some years ago who—who did this, and mother told Cicely about it. I wasn't supposed to know, of course, and Cicely said: 'How absolutely disgusting!' She would probably say it about me, too. I suppose it is, but—I don't care—I loved him, and we were happy."

"Not much help now! And I can't think of anyone else but Cicely who can possibly assist us. You see, I don't know anybody up here who—" he stopped short, for he suddenly remembered that he did know somebody —and somebody who would not say: "How absolutely disgusting"—but might help, if he could bring himself to go to her and ask.

It would be a hateful task, but he would do it for Jean.

"I'll see what I can do," he said. "Come with me now, and I'll introduce you to the manageress, and ask her to give you a room for a day or two until we can look round. I suppose, if you have been traveling, you have had no lunch nor tea?"

The manageress was quite understanding when she learned who Jean was, and had verified it by her registering. She agreed to find her a room for a couple of nights, and took her upstairs, while Dennis went to telephone Alixe at Blecton Park.

After a time she came to the telephone, and listened to his halting apology for troubling her.

"I'm in a devil of a fix—can I see you?"

"It's rather late for you to come here—what is it?"

"Will you come to the hotel, then? My sister Jean is here, so it will be quite proper, and nobody can talk."

"No, I'm sorry, but I never go to the hotels, you know. People stare at me, and I hate it. Is it really important? Won't it wait, and then you can come to tea tomorrow, and bring your sister, too, if you like."

"I want to see you this evening, if possible. It's more than important—it's desperate!"

Evidently his voice sounded like it, for Alixe at once said: "All right, I'll drive down to Mundesley Post Office, Dennis, at 8:30, as soon as it is dark, if you can meet me there. Will that do? I won't fail you—I'll come if I say so. Half-past eight."

. . . . .

Dinner was necessarily early at the hotel, for absolutely no lights, except a few candles, were allowed in any of the sea-facing rooms; and, therefore, those who had not finished dining when darkness fell were obliged to continue by the light of one candle on each table.

As for the roads and the village, they were, of course, in complete darkness except when swept by searchlights; for no street lamp might be lit, and even cars had to have military permission to carry lights.

It was not quite dark, however, when Dennis reached the village post office and stores. It was closed now, but outside stood Mr. Meyerling's expensive car with the hood up, and the *chauffeuse* in a dark-blue coat, and close-fitting cap, at the wheel.

Dennis had walked to attract less attention, and came up to her at once.

"How perfectly sweet of you to come! Alixe, you are a darling. And I've got the most beastly thing to tell you —I don't know how to begin."

Alixe sat motionless—only her eyes seemed alive; those smoky, mysterious eyes which had first attracted him.

"What is it all about? Me? Go on!"

"You? No, why should it be about you? That would not be beastly. It's about my sister Jean—I told you on the telephone that she is at the Cliff Hotel. May I come into your car?"

"Yes, get in, and we'll drive out of the village. I don't want to be seen here, especially at night and with you, for your sake."

They drove slowly out of the village and past the harbor, and she listened without comment to his halting story.

"I can't help feeling a little bit responsible for it," he said. "Jack Eden was my pal—I took him home and introduced him to Jean. And—and he introduced me to you. Somehow I can't believe it of Jack—it's just too rotten!"

"Yes, I know; but it is the indirect result of the war,

Dennis." Alixe stopped the car. "I expect it's the same in other countries, too. And is it for us to say they are wicked? I don't know, for it might have happened to either you or me. The men are going out every day to be killed—slaughtered—never to return perhaps; and it's the greatest thing that a woman can give or sacrifice for them—either that, or else they simply love, and in the parting they lose all sense of the consequences."

"Alixe, you're wonderful!" He caught her hand and held it tight. "So sensible, and—and not a bit shocked or disgusted as other women like my mother or Cicely would be. But it could never have happened to you—that's where you are wrong. You are too good—really good, I mean—and no man could ever have been a beast with you."

"You're an idealist, Dennis." She pressed his hand. "It is you who are good. What was it I used to call you —'My perfect knight'—and so you are. But there are not many men like you. I've seen life, Dennis, as you have not, even in the war; and I've been to places and learned things that you do not dream exist. And you ask if I am shocked! Yes, we must help Jean, of course. I'll come and see her in the morning when the hotel is empty. I don't see why she should not stay at the private hotel for a month or so, until we can find a suitable place for her. I know they have rooms there, and the proprietress is a nice woman, and kind—I know her. I'm glad you came to me, and I'll do what I can."

"I didn't know how you'd take it," Dennis almost stammered his thanks; "it's such a strange thing to tell a girl like you; but I couldn't think what to do, and Jean seems such a child to me—she is ten years younger than I; and I hate above all to think that she has been ruined by a man who said he was a friend of mine. My God! I could kill him for it!"

"But you don't know where he is," said Alixe quietly. "We shall hear of him soon, and then—well, I think Dr.

Eden isn't altogether bad, and he'll marry her. They may be happy yet, who knows?"

She turned and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Don't be too hard on her, Dennis! It might, whatever you may say, have been—us, or one of us. Now I must go back—no, I mustn't stay. I will drive through the village again, and drop you at the post office; and tomorrow I'll come up."

"You're an angel," said Dennis, kissing the hand so near his lips. "I'll never forget it."

. . . . .

Jean remained in her room during the morning. It had a balcony looking over the cliff and sea, and she sat there doing nothing.

Even when Dennis brought Alixe to see her, she showed little interest, and hardly spoke. Yesterday she had shown some spirit and life, but today even that had gone.

"I don't mind where I go nor what I do," she said. "Yes, I'll stay at the little hotel for a week or two; it's all the same to me, if Dennis doesn't mind. Perhaps, by then, Jack will have written, or possibly have come home. His leave must be due again, and then we shall be married, of course. Nothing else matters."

They tried to make her understand that many other things would have to matter, especially if her Jack did not come home on leave; and Dennis thought it quite possible that he might not, but spend it, as so many officers did, in Paris. Apparently he did not know what had happened, and that there was any reason why he should come home; and Dennis had a small opinion of his fidelity.

Jean would not even go out. There was no reason why she should not, as Alixe told her when Dennis had left the room, but she only shook her head. She would go to the other hotel if they would make arrangements, but until then she preferred to remain on the balcony.

She thanked Alixe, however, before she left; put her

arms round the other girl's neck, and kissed her gratefully, with tears in her eyes.

"I don't wonder Dennis loves you," she added. "If I were a man, I'd give up everything for you—go to the war—be killed—anything! Will you marry him, do you think? I wish you would!"

"I'm afraid that is out of the question," said Alixe gently, "even if I loved your brother; so don't let's talk about it. Let us discuss your Jack instead, and your marriage when he comes home."

"*If* he comes home." Jean's eyes traveled out over the sea. It was all gray today, and rain was beginning to fall; but it was almost as if she strove to see beyond it—what was going on over the other side where the guns were.

"If anything happens to Jack, it will kill me!"

"These things don't kill us—we don't have to let them."

"It wouldn't kill you, because you are beautiful and strong; but I am little and weak, and it would kill me."

"Then I shouldn't think about it," smiled Alixe. "Don't read the papers—get a nice book, or go out."

She kissed her good-by, and went downstairs again. Dennis had gone on duty, and she did not see him as she passed out to her car.

. . . . .

That evening, Dennis asked Lennox, when the opportunity offered, if he had heard anything of Jack Eden, but here again he drew blank.

"No," replied Lennox in astonishment. "I've heard nothing for a twelvemonth. Why—do you want him? Possibly I could get in touch with him through the hospital."

"He is going to marry my sister," said Dennis, determined that he should know at any cost, "and she is worried to death, for she has heard nothing from him since he was at home on leave at Easter."

"I had no idea he was going to be your brother-in-law."

Lennox raised his eyebrows in polite surprise. "Never thought of old Jack Eden as a marrying man, do you know!"

"Neither did I, and I don't particularly want him as a brother-in-law," dryly. "But he's going to be, when I can get hold of him."

"Where is your sister, Armitage?"

"Here, staying in the hotel for a day or two."

"Here! I see. I'll try the hospital for you, and find out if they have news of him. By the way, I saw you in the village last evening."

"Well, what about it if you did? Is the village out of bounds?"

Lennox smiled—nothing ever put him out, and no one in the camp had ever seen him lose his temper.

"No, I merely mentioned that I saw you—with a lady. Was that by any chance your sister?"

"I think you know perfectly well that it was not."

"True—I recognized the car as one which comes in every day from Blecton Park. So you did get that invitation from friend Meyerling?"

"Is this a problem? Yes, I did, and more than one. But I have only been there once to tea."

"And, if I may advise you, let it remain at that. Cut the rest out."

Dennis looked at him frowning, and longing to say: "What the hell has it to do with you where I go?" But Lennox was a Staff Officer and his superior; and Army life had taught him to hold his tongue, even under extreme provocation.

"Could you explain," he observed, "I don't quite follow you."

"Explanations are tedious things," murmured Lennox, "and I am not talking officially—I merely suggested as a friend, and because I like you, that you should go slow and not be too anxious to accept old Meyerling's invitations, nor—" he paused to light a cigarette—"allow yourself to

be seen in the village at night with the gentleman's private secretary. It's slightly—unwise."

"Do you know Miss Gerard then?"

"Miss who? No, I don't. But Blecton Park—well, it's wiser to keep clear, that's all. And I must be getting along now. Glad when my time on the East Coast is up—rotten place, isn't it?"

"Damnable," answered Dennis fervently, knowing that it was not the slightest use asking Lennox for further explanation because he wouldn't get one; and even if he did, that he would not know precisely what it meant.

Alixe was always surrounded by suspicion and mystery.

CHAPTER FIVE

IT poured with rain for the most part of the following week, and Dennis found himself on duty from morning to night, as his Major was away on leave.

He saw Jean at some time every day. She was comfortable in her quarters at the small hotel, and seemed well, though she never talked, nor showed the slightest interest in her surroundings or companions. She appeared to be waiting for something; and though Alixe, too, had been to see her once or twice, she had found her just the same.

If he had had time, he would have worried more; but even as it was, Dennis told Alixe he thought he ought to let his mother know, and she was forced to agree with him. He had only, roughly, another month to put in at the Mundesley camp, and it was doubtful (so she told him) how long she herself would be here. And Jean was not well, nor herself, and most certainly not fit to be left alone.

Then the matter settled itself suddenly.

After hours of machine-gun practice on the cliffs, and in the driving rain, Dennis returned late one afternoon to the hotel, intending, after a cup of tea, to go and see Jean.

Outside the hotel, however, stood Lennox's big, high-powered car; and the latter was sitting in the hall, a couple of papers spread out before him.

"I've been waiting for you, Armitage," he said. "Seen the London papers?"

"Glanced at them, but I've not had much time today. I haven't been through the lists."

"You saw about the hospital ship? Nice people, the Huns!"

"Yes, I saw the headline. God! What a thing to do! Are there many drowned—anyone you know?"

"Yes, whom we both know. You asked me about Eden—there he is," and he put his finger on the paper. "He was on the ship, bringing his wounded home."

Dennis took the paper and saw the name among those killed by the explosion on board:

"Major John Eden, M.D., R.A.M.C."

"Rotten to be killed like that," said Lennox in a perfectly expressionless voice. "I'm sorry, too; he was a good chap among men, and a good surgeon. We hoped he would come back to the King's Hospital afterwards, and he seemed to bear a charmed life, for, like myself, he was never once seriously wounded. But he won't come now. I liked Eden—yes, I'm sorry. And it's rough on your sister, too."

"Rough, yes!" Dennis laid the paper on the table, and stood staring at it. Those damned U-boats and their inhuman commanders! Torpedoing a hospital ship at night, when her lights were plainly burning and her Red Cross brilliantly illuminated! There could be no mistake; only that same old played-out tale of hospital ships carrying munitions and armament! But as this boat was returning to England, even this would not do.

Poor old Jack Eden! He had been a cheery friend, and in this minute Dennis could even have forgiven him for Jean, remembering the many good times they had had together.

But Jean! His thoughts came back to her with a jerk.

"I must get along," said Lennox's voice. "I've an appointment, but I thought perhaps you hadn't seen the news, and you would be interested."

Dennis heard him go, and the engine of his car as he drove away, but still he stood there with the papers, wondering how he should break the news to Jean, or if

she already knew. There were headlines about it in all the papers—she must have seen it.

"You are wanted on the telephone, Captain Armitage."

He heard Alixe's voice at the other end.

"Dennis, have you seen the papers?" she asked without greeting. "About the hospital ship? And Jack Eden was on board, and has been killed."

"Yes, I've seen it. Major Lennox gave them to me just now. He knew Jack Eden at the King's Hospital—Lennox was chairman of it before the war, and I had asked him to try if he could trace Jack for me. What am I to do about Jean? Can you tell her, Alixe? She will have to know, and I'm sure I can't do it."

"I think she knows already. I am telephoning from the hotel where she is staying—I came here as soon as I heard the news, hoping to keep it from her, or at least break it gently to her, and not let her see it in the papers. But I was too late. The proprietress says Jean must have seen them as soon as they came at lunch-time, and she went out and hasn't come back yet."

"How do they know she has seen them?"

"She took the *Daily Mirror* with her, apparently. One of the maids saw her with it. Dennis, she must be looked for before dark. That is why I telephoned. Nobody has seen her since, and it is six o'clock now."

"Good God! And nobody knows where she has gone? It's raining, too, and cold. She ought not to be out on the cliffs—if she is there."

"Somebody must look for her, and quickly."

"She is not in the hotel—are you sure?"

"No, we have searched everywhere."

"Then I must get a search-party from the camp if we don't find her before dark. I'll go myself now, and take my batman; but they shall search all night if necessary. I should have told them at the hotel not to let her see any of the papers, but how could I guess?"

"You could not, Dennis; and I'm sorry, but I can't

come with you—you understand that, don't you? It would not do for you to be seen with me on the cliffs at night, or even at dusk; it might mean trouble for you—for, you see, I'm marked, and I know it."

"I know it, too," answered Dennis, and for the first time (hating himself for it) he felt suspicion really rise within himself and turn him cold. Why did she allow herself to be suspected and marked like this, unless there was cause for it and she could not help herself? She did not need to live at Blecton Park (in itself a marked house) nor with foreigners. If she was even half-English, she could get a living otherwise—what about munitions? Or clerical work in the many Government offices all over the country; in the banks, and all other businesses? If Alixe was as capable and experienced, as she declared she was, as a secretary, it was absurd to suppose she could only get employment in the house of a man who was openly talked of as a German. She had never given him the impression of wanting, or enjoying, a lazy life with a comfortable home, good pay, and kind employers, which were the actual reasons she had given him when he asked her why she remained at Blecton.

No, try as he would to forget, and cast it out of his mind, suspicion recurred. Alixe had other reasons for being here—and mysterious reasons also for hanging about the highest and loneliest parts of the cliffs.

"What do you think about this sinking of the hospital ship?" he asked, still holding on to the telephone. "You can't admire even your Germans now, Alixe, nor surely can you wish to acknowledge relationship with them!"

"The relationship, unfortunately, is there," answered Alixe, and her voice was quite cold now, "whether I acknowledge it or not. And, this is war, isn't it? You had better start on your search for Jean."

"Will you leave that house, Alixe, if I beg you to? I wish to God you would!"

"I can't leave it, and never mind about me just now; go and look for Jean. And God speed you, Dennis."

She rang off without waiting for a reply.

. . . . .

They searched the cliffs and beach for miles all that September night, while the rain poured down, and the wind howled round the rocks, the old square-towered churches, and over the stubble where once the corn had waved like a lake of gold; but it was left to two soldiers to find her at sunrise, a lifeless little heap on the sands beneath the cliff, washed up and left by the night tide, with a fragment of a daily paper still clutched in her cold hand.

. . . . .

They took her back to the village where an inquest was held in the schools, and Dennis had to be present and identify her as his sister.

After three years of war, tragedy becomes a daily occurrence, and Dennis himself was surprised how he bore it.

One day here, and the next, "gone West"! That was life at present. Jack Eden, whom he had loved as a friend, and spent so much time with—dead! And now, Jean, his pretty little sister! This was war—direct and indirect.

He said as much to Alixe whom he told, driving over to Blecton Park on purpose, although she already knew; for tragic news travels quickly, especially in the country.

"She seems so young to have died like that, all alone," he said, scarcely knowing what to say. "And perhaps if we had been there it wouldn't have happened. Do you think it was an accident, Alixe?"

"No," answered Alixe, "she said that she should kill herself if anything happened to him; I don't think she wanted to live after she knew. And after all, Dennis, I am more sorry for you. Jean and Jack Eden are together

now, and have forgotten it all; but you are left. Yes, I feel most for your mother and you. Has she been told?"

"I expect so, I have not told her; I left it to my uncle and Cicely. It's all so rotten—why on earth should Jack Eden have been killed? There are plenty of men, and he was needed, and I hate to think of Jean——"

"The indirect result of war, Dennis. It is responsible for far more than the men who are killed in action. That is only one side of it, but what of the air-raids—the people who have been killed in London this summer, and at Scarborough and Lowestoft? What of the *Lusitania?*"

"Yes, but that was war!" cried Dennis. "This is suicide, and waste of life, for Jack Eden wasn't worth it. He did not play the game, and Jean was not by a long way his first."

"Does a woman ever judge the man she cares for by what he is worth in the eyes of the world?" questioned Alixe sadly. "Doesn't she rather set up her own standard of worth by what he is to her? Jack Eden may have been quite different to Jean, and worth all the world to her. He must have been."

"He ought not to have done what he did."

"Sometimes, Dennis, the woman is to blame as well."

"Jean was only a girl of twenty, how could she be?"

"She was a woman in love;—even such love—knows no law or age."

"I blame him. Even though he was my friend, and is dead, too—I blame him."

"Dennis, you have never been tempted, so how can you justly judge? Blame! Condemn! No one should do that who has not been tempted."

"You can hardly say that—*you* don't know."

"Oh, yes—I know you." She looked at him with her wise eyes. "And you are good all through. But good people do not always understand the other side of life, and their judgment is harsh. Blame neither Jean nor

Jack Eden—leave them in peace. And, Dennis," she hesitated, "have you sent for your mother?"

"I went over to Elverstrand this morning and told my uncle and Cicely. They have let my mother know, but I do not suppose she will come here; it is a long way and she is not well. She may wish us to take Jean home, but my uncle suggests that if she does not, she shall be buried at Elverstrand. But what were you going to say?"

"There is no need to tell your mother, Dennis—nor Cicely. You know what I mean. No one would have known except a doctor; and why shame Jean and hurt your mother? Will they bring in a verdict of suicide, do you think?"

"It is possible, but not certain. The opinion is that she may have been walking too near the edge of the cliffs —they are very crumbly and dangerous—and she might have slipped and fallen over in the darkness at high tide. If that is suggested, I shall not contradict it, and they will give a verdict of accidental death, or found drowned; but——"

"Even if it is suicide, there is no need for them to know more than that she was going to be married, and saw Jack Eden's name in the casualty list among the killed. That was quite enough to distract her, so why tell the rest, Dennis? Can't we keep that a secret, not only for your sister's sake, but just a little, too, for his? For I think we both liked him."

"Yes, he was a good sort among men. I always liked him," said Dennis. "And possibly he did not realize; for the war has made people, so it seems to me, live more in the present than ever they did before—life is so uncertain. Now I must go. I've applied for special leave, as I shall have to visit home for a few days, after this, and see the Mater. Cicely," he smiled ruefully, "will come with me, she says; and I suppose I can't refuse her offer, although I'd rather she didn't."

"Oh, why?" Alixe looked surprised. "It's rather nice

of her; she is very fond of you, you know, Dennis, and you ought to marry her."

"Thanks. Is that a way of saying you don't want me? I have told you that it is you or nobody. I only wish you would tell me the truth—but you won't."

He remembered wishing precisely the same thing three years ago, and knowing even then that she had not told him true stories about herself, but just what she wished him to know. Alixe was the only thing which had not changed with the war and the passing years.

. . . . .

The coroner gave a verdict of accidental death in Jean's case, as there was no evidence that she had drowned herself, nor that there was any apparent reason for her to do so.

Alixe attended the inquest, giving her name as Gerard, and her occupation as *chauffeuse*-secretary; but neither she nor Captain Armitage had any more to say than that Jean had come to visit her brother, to whose friend she was engaged to be married.

The proprietress of the hotel knew only this: That she had probably seen in the papers that her fiancé had been killed. She had gone out with the paper, and had been seen on the cliff by some soldiers; it was dark early that night, and at high tide the sea washed right up to the cliff. If she had fallen over then, there would have been no marks to show, and only Dennis, and one or two others, knew that Jean had disappeared from the cliffs long before high tide.

They did not take her home after all, and her mother was too ill to come to Norfolk; so the Rev. Adam Harding conducted the funeral service, in his little country church on the cliffs, before the remains of Jean Armitage, aged twenty, were laid to rest in the moss-covered, grass-grown churchyard among the last of the summer's poppies and the rambler roses.

It was a lovely, early autumn day, and the sun lay over the East Coast and gilded it with fairness; still and warm, with that strange sense of desolation which only comes with departed summer.

There were very few people present, for the elder sister, Phyllis, could not leave her mother. A handful of soldiers who had assisted in the search that night, the Hardings, and Dennis, Major Lennox (though why he should come, Dennis did not know), and a woman in gray who stood aside and slipped away before the service was properly over.

Dennis saw her and longed to speak to, and thank her for coming, but she had disappeared, and he had to return to the Rectory to be "comforted"; as if it was possible to be comforted over a thing like this!

Neither Cicely nor her father could understand at all how it was that Jean had been staying at Mundesley, and not with them—had not even been over to see them.

As far as he was able, Dennis explained then that Jean had come to him to find out where Jack Eden was, as she was going to marry him. She had seen his name in the casualty list of the sunk hospital ship, and she must have become distracted—that was all.

"She should have come over and stayed with us," said Cicely. "I could have looked after her. She ought not to have been staying alone at that boarding-house, and you ought to have let your mother know at once, Dennis."

Dennis did not argue. He drank the tea they gave him, and sat quiet while Cicely and her father talked.

Then: "So I *was* right about Alixe Helm, or Gerard," remarked Cicely, "it was she. Do you see much of her? Is she still at Blecton Park? And why did she come to the funeral?"

"She liked Jean, and used to go and see her," answered Dennis briefly, because he did not want to talk about Alixe to Cicely. "Yes, she is still at Blecton Park. Why?"

"Don't you think she is a spy, Dennis? I do."

"No, of course I don't. The Meyerlings are under suspicion because they are not British, and Alixe comes in with them because she lives under their roof; but—she is all right."

"You think so? I don't—Alixe is German. Dennis, I saw her in the post office again the other day. I was going to tell you, and ask you to come here so that I could; but this terrible affair of Jean's put it completely out of my head. I went into Elverstrand Post Office about ten days ago again, and she was there, sending a telegram——"

"Oh, please, Cicely, I don't want to hear!"

"You must hear, it is your duty. She dropped a letter on the floor, and I saw it. It was in German!"

"Well? That has nothing to do with either you or me—it may have been written before the war. Alixe had many German friends, of course."

"I believe she is married to that German officer I told you about!"

"She says she is not married, and I won't listen to you any more. It is neither my business nor yours."

"But I'm right, Dennis—I'm right!" cried Cicely. "Can't you see it for yourself?"

He longed to say: "I can see you are being damned impertinent and inquisitive," but he did not.

"Ask her straight out, and find out the truth," urged his cousin. "She won't dare deny it if it is true, and I've heard some extraordinary and terrible rumors lately about this part. They say that several of the German officers have escaped from the prisoners-of-war camp near Norwich—that news and private information has leaked out about the East Coast defenses, and the number of men here. Haven't you heard?"

Dennis had heard, and knew, moreover, that there were intelligence officers among the staff whose business it was to watch these happenings, and stop them; but few among the Army officers knew even who they were.

Dennis suspected one, but even that was uncertain.

"Of course, I have heard," he replied wearily, "but I do not believe what you do, and I'd rather not discuss it. I've had really enough worry and trouble this last week, without your piling it on."

"But it's only for your own sake, Dennis," she returned reproachfully, "and perhaps for poor Aunt Augusta, too. Think what she would feel if you were involved in a scandal, especially after this dreadful business. You owe it to her, Dennis—yes, and to us, too, to be careful."

Since he could not be rude, and he was physically incapable of being polite to her, Dennis said good night, and left.

A day or two later, he went home to Longmead.

CHAPTER SIX

YET it would have astonished Dennis considerably had he seen Alixe one afternoon the first week in October; for she left Blecton Park in the Meyerlings' car, and drove inland for several miles until she came to a small town.

It was not a pretty village like so many of the Norfolk ones, but a town of narrow streets and old-fashioned brick houses. A few shops, a post office, police-station, and bank, comprised its public buildings; and there was a garage to which Alixe drove her car and left it.

She had been wearing her dark driving coat and cap, but now these were tucked away under the seat of the car, and she appeared in a neat gray tailor-made suit, and a black tam-o'shanter (so fashionable at that time).

Then she walked away from the garage and down the village street, until she came to a house with a brass plate, which had on it: "Mr. H. Jones. Solicitor. Commissioner for Oaths."

Her ring was answered by a man, who heard her request, and said: "Come in—Mr. Jones is expecting you," and led the way upstairs to the "office."

There was a green baize door here, and space between that and the inner door; and in the room two men were seated at the table.

"Miss Smith," said the man who had preceded her upstairs.

The two men rose. They wore civilian clothes, and yet had a military appearance; and on the table lay a small automatic pistol.

One of them held out his hand to Alixe with a smile.

"Ah—Fräulein Helm," he said. "Our famous Fräulein Helm. Let me introduce you."

A smile flickered over Alixe's face, and she put her hand into the proffered one.

"It's quite well—I've found the path at last, and the entrance."

"Good. We'll come over one day."

"It is about thirty feet below the cliff at almost the highest point, but it could be done with a rope ladder if the night was chosen, and it was dark or foggy. The entrance to the passage is much further down, but well above the cave."

"Is the cave and passage clear?"

"Yes—we have done that—you can get through now. I have made a plan of the cliff face showing exactly the position of the path and entrance. It is rough—but——"

She took it out, and they studied it together.

"You don't know *when?*" asked Mr. Jones.

"Not yet—the wireless has not been working this week, but I'll try again tonight. We had a message from U 21 last week, but they were going south. I—reported it, of course. But it is U 14 we are waiting for, is it not?"

"Yes. Is all ready at the house?"

"Quite—all quiet. M. will go to Harwich as soon as he hears; and B. remains."

"No trouble today? You are watched, you know."

"Of course—doubly watched. No—I think not; but it will not be our people, anyway." She smiled again—that strange, flickering smile. "Will you come over then?"

"First misty day, or moonless night. You will get the usual message. Not—nervous, are you?"

"Nervous?" She laughed scornfully. "Are our soldiers nervous, do you think? What does it matter?"

"Not unless——"

"What does that matter? If you succeed, what do *I* matter? I'm only—" again the smile flickered—"C.W.31

—Fräulein Helm; and the next winter will perhaps be warmer than the last—in Berlin! But I'm all right."

She turned to go, but the second man motioned her back.

"A moment. There is an officer from the camp who goes to Blecton Park to see you—a Captain Armitage of the artillery. You know him?"

"Yes."

"Any fear that he will make trouble? He seems to hang round you."

"I don't think so." But she hesitated as she said it. "I must keep him quiet."

"He might upset our plans—you had better watch him, and see that he does not interfere."

"Yes—but they must not find him at the house, you know, or he might—well, be found shot. I don't trust them, or I would drop him a hint to keep away. No—I dare not even do that, for I'm watched day and night, and marked down. He will have to take his chance; but I'll try to keep him away, and if nothing leaks out I see no reason why he should come. Good-by—" she turned to the door—"if you do find him, let him down easily, won't you? I'd hate to hurt him."

"Oh, we'll see to that," was the reply. "Good-by, Miss Smith——"

She went out of the room with a swinging step, and down the stairs. The clerk opened the door. No one took any notice of her.

. . . . .

Dennis Armitage had returned to Mundesley, but there was no sign of Alixe; and a letter to Blecton Park brought forth no reply, and thereby raised fresh and uncomfortable suspicions as to her doings.

In desperation, he called at the house, but she was either out or engaged; and then he wrote again to her, asking her to meet him at the post office at four o'clock the fol-

lowing afternoon—determined that he must see her and find out the truth.

. . . . .

He waited at the post office for an hour in his car, but there was no sign of Alixe; and a heavy autumnal mist was coming up rapidly over the cliffs.

He wondered whether she had mistaken the place, or not received his letter, and decided to drive out again to Blecton Park and inquire for her.

At the top of the lane, however, where a turning on the right led on to the cliffs, he pulled up.

It was near here that twice before he had seen Alixe; and some peculiar instinct, or sixth sense, told him now that she was near—so that he left the car and walked over the turf, although already the whole scene was shrouded in a thick gray blanket, right over the edge.

Once he stopped, telling himself impatiently that it was ridiculous—that Alixe would not be out on the cliffs in this weather, unless—unless she had some good reason for it; and he was about to turn back to the car when he saw a group of three people about fifty yards away.

In a second he knew that one of them was Alixe, although she was wearing a strange dark cloak which he had not seen before, and a tam-o'shanter; and as the mist lifted for a minute he saw that her companions were two men in raincoats and soft hats.

They had their backs to him, and were standing, so far as he could see, quite near the edge of the cliff; and obviously they did not see him, nor suspect his presence.

Why should they do so, or be there themselves on such a day? And why had Alixe neither kept the appointment nor written?

Again suspicion rushed back at him, and all the tales he had heard from Cicely and other sources crowded in upon his remembrance. Alixe did not want to see him—she would neither keep an appointment nor write—and

yet she was here in Mundesley all the time, and neither ill nor engaged, except upon very curious and indeed mysterious business, which could have little connection with her work as secretary at Blecton Park.

What on earth was she doing on these cliffs again in a thick fog, with two civilians whom he had never seen before, and would not know if he saw them again?

This was the third or fourth time he had come across her just here, within half a mile, coming up from the beach or watching it from above—searching for caves and paths below, looking for *something.*

And what possible interest could all this have for "harmless old Meyerling," whose business was with Holland—or for herself, merely his secretary?

Dennis stood still, angry and cold. He debated within himself whether or not to go up and "have it out" with her. But as he hesitated they moved away and disappeared in the mist, still obviously unconscious of his presence, as well they might be on such a day, and just at tea-time. (For even on a fine afternoon at this hour the cliff was always deserted.)

He determined to follow now, and see who the men were, what they were like, and where they were all going; but the shifting mist separated them, and by the time he reached the spot where he had seen them standing by the old coastguard signal, they had completely disappeared.

. . . . .

In the hotel dining-room that evening there was a new topic of conversation, but it was not spoken very loud.

A German U-boat had been sighted out at sea—it was rumored that there were more escapes from the officer prisoners-of-war camp at Burbridge Hall. Strange things had been observed taking place on the beach and cliffs——

Dennis Armitage could have added to the last tale, but he did not. He only listened, until the end of dinner, when he heard something passed among a group of officers at the next table——

"A pretty Hun——"

"Yes—I know who you mean. I've seen her in the village."

"She drives his car—I saw her here one day in the hotel—yes, I saw him with her."

Dennis got up and went across to them.

"Who did you see me with?" he asked lightly. "Yes—I caught my name—let's hear it!"

"Old Meyerling's secretary—whom it is said——"

"Shut up, you fool—even the candles have ears on the East Coast. Yes—and eyes too!"

"—say she rakes our cliffs, waiting for the arrival of the German fleet."

"But she is English," replied Dennis slowly—careful what he said now. "I knew her in London before the war."

"It is said she is as German as old Meyerling himself, and the pair of them are chief assistants to a master spy—Carl von something; who, if rumor speaks true, is also in this neighborhood."

"Escaped from Burbridge Hall Grand Hotel?"

"No—landed in a rowing boat from the High Seas Fleet. Old Tirps dropped him over."

"He might have landed with a parachute during that last Zeppelin raid—who knows?"

They were all young men, bored stiff with a dull life, and Army routine in a dull place. They laughed, and thought it a joke. But Dennis Armitage saw nothing funny in it whatever.

He left them, and went out into the hall—meeting the manageress even as he did so.

"You are wanted on the telephone, Captain Armitage," she said. "I was just coming to fetch you."

(Was it fancy, or did she look at him curiously as she spoke? It did not matter, however, for he did not hesitate, except to say: "Thanks," knowing that only one person would be likely to ring him up at this hour.)

To his surprise, however, a voice that he did not know said over the wire:

"Is that Captain Armitage? You wrote to Miss Gerard at Blecton Abbey to meet you this afternoon——"

"Who is it speaking?" asked Dennis.

"Did Miss Gerard meet you?"

(Where had he heard that voice before?)

"That's my business, isn't it," he answered. "What do you want, and where are you speaking from?"

"Did Miss Gerard meet you this afternoon, and do you know where she is tonight?"

"Tell me who you are, and I'll perhaps answer you."

"Keep away from Blecton Park, and write no more letters, for she does not get them."

Dennis swore. So that was why she did not come!

"Who on earth are you?" he shouted into the phone. But there was only a faint laugh at the other end.

"Leave Miss Gerard alone—and keep clear of Blecton Abbey. She did not meet you, apparently."

He heard the other speaker ring off, and set down the receiver, wondering angrily what it meant. Why did somebody wish to know if he had met Alixe? It had nothing to do with anyone else on earth. And why were his letters intercepted?

"I'm damn well going to find out," thought Dennis. "I'm not going to be warned off like this. I'll go there now, and investigate this mystery once and for all."

He glanced at the clock. It was not much past half-past eight, and even driving slowly through the fog he could be at Blecton Park before nine o'clock.

And he must see Alixe—tell her what he had heard, and about this curious telephone message.

He rushed for his coat, and met Major Lennox entering the hotel as he was leaving it.

"Here—Armitage," he called. But Dennis was in too great a hurry to stop or pay attention.

"Sorry—I've an appointment," he called back—and bolted out into the darkness.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE house, at all times rather shut in and gloomy, was in total darkness when he drove up to it. All the shutters were up, and not a gleam of light showed anywhere.

"What on earth does she live in such a place for!" he thought uneasily. "One could be murdered and thrown over the cliffs, or buried in the vaults, and nobody be any the wiser."

It was a long time, too, before he heard the bolts being withdrawn, and the door was opened by the old servant whose nationality Dennis had not yet placed.

"Miss Gerard is expecting me," he began. "Will you tell her Captain Armitage is here."

"Come inside," said the man. "I will tell her. But my master is away, and Mrs. Van Hoyt is in her room with a cold. And Miss Gerard did not say anyone was coming."

There was no necessity to go and tell her, however, for at that instant Alixe came down the staircase.

She wore a black dress, very straight and plain, with a fine white lace collar, and a long gold chain and ear-rings. There was something quite different and strange about her, and he noticed it immediately as he waited.

She exclaimed: "Dennis! Oh, but you should not have come like this—I forbade you to. What is the matter?"

"I wanted to see you," replied Dennis quietly, "and you did not answer my letters, nor would you meet me, so I had to come."

"And you must go again—at once. Mr. Meyerling is away, and I am alone. You cannot stay here—it is simply impossible."

"I am going to, nevertheless, until I have said what I have come to say. Can I see you alone, please?" with a glance at the surly-looking manservant who was watching them, and listening to every word.

"I have told you," began Alixe, "that it's quite impossible for you to stay, and you ought never to have come." And then she suddenly broke off; but whether it was some message in the eyes of the man who was watching, or something about Dennis himself, he did not know; and her voice changed:

"Come into the library," she added, "and tell me what has brought you here."

She cast an odd look at the servant—half-nodded, and said: "You can go, Dermot," in rather a haughty tone, and led the way across the hall.

Dennis followed her into a room he had not seen before; for he had only twice been inside the house, and each time in the drawing- and garden-rooms, which opened one into the other.

This one was at the end of the hall—a large, square apartment with a heavy plush curtain over the door, and others over what was evidently a French window. There was a big flat writing-table, with a typewriter and a quantity of reference files upon it—a safe, half-hidden by a screen, and two or three deep, leather-covered arm-chairs.

"You should not have come here," said Alixe again as he closed the door after them. "I've told you not to—and it is for your sake, Dennis."

"Was it you who telephoned, then?"

"What do you mean—when? I have not telephoned you."

He told her of the strange telephone message he had received, and her face changed. She looked uneasy, and a little pale, but she made no remark, nor suggested any explanation as she switched on the electric lights and walked across to the writing-table.

The room did not face the sea, Dennis judged, and the

lamp had a red shade; but even so, all electricity was prohibited on that part of the coast.

She saw his stare of surprise as the light went up.

"Yes—we have our own plant," she explained coolly. "It is kept in the vaults. You see, electricity is necessary to us here, because of the wireless—we have to charge our batteries, you know. Will you sit down? I'm sorry I couldn't meet you this afternoon as you asked me, but it was too foggy for one thing, and for another, I was in Norwich. Will you smoke?"

"No, thanks. I was under the impression that electricity and wireless were forbidden on the East Coast"—Dennis did not even sit down—"so perhaps it would be a good beginning if you were to explain why this man Meyerling, who is not even British, uses them against orders."

"We take no orders—we are a law unto ourselves—that is why. Well?"

"Then why did you tell me a lie just now, and say you were in Norwich this afternoon? You were not."

"I was—I lunched at the King's Head Hotel."

"You were not there at the time I asked you to meet me at the post office—if you received my letter. Did you?"

"Yes—but I couldn't come."

"Somebody else received it too, then; and did not know whether you met me or not. But you *were* in Mundesley—on the cliffs, where I have twice seen you before."

"Yes—you are right." She nodded. "But you asked me to meet you at the post office at four o'clock—not on the cliffs at five; so what were you doing there, may I ask?"

"I waited half an hour for you; then I walked up on to the cliff. I hardly know why—intuition perhaps, that you were there. I meant to return to the post office and see if you had mistaken the time; but after I saw you there, I did not."

"If you saw me, why didn't you speak to me?"

"For one thing, because you were not alone, and another,

because the fog was very thick, and by the time I reached the spot where I saw you and two men—by the coastguard signal, that is—you had all three disappeared. Where you went to, I don't know, unless there is a path invisible from the top."

"There is a path," said Alixe.

"The one you have been looking for on each occasion I have seen you at that particular spot?"

"Yes."

"And it leads down to a part of the beach invisible from the top of the cliffs, and possibly to some caves. I know this coast pretty well, you see, and I can guess the point. There's a little beach leading into a cave."

"How clever you are!" said Alixe in the same tone. "A beach—a cave—a path—well? Won't you smoke?"

"No, thanks—I didn't come to pay a social call and talk platitudes, nor to smoke and be comfortable. I came to ask you, in fairness to me, to tell me the truth about yourself, Meyerling, and—everything. You know what is said round here, Alixe, not only about this self-styled Dutchman, but about you now—and the house."

"Of course—I've known it all along. Have I not told you that I always live under suspicion?"

"Yes—but is it only suspicion, Alixe? It is that uncertainty which tortures me. I know so little about you, and you will not tell me, or else you do not tell me the truth. It would not matter if I did not care so much for you, but I do, and you know it. It is not fair of you to leave me in ignorance like this, and yet let me hear you freely discussed in the hotel dining-room as I did this evening, as——"

"Well?" Her voice cut in sharp and clear. "As what?"

"As assistant to Carl von Wehlen—master spy, and now rumored to be in this district, and whom I believe I once met at your flat."

"Oh, yes—of course, you did meet Carl, didn't you!"

Alixe flicked off her cigarette ash with a steady hand—as steady as the eyes that watched him all the time.

"But you did not call him by that name then, if I remember rightly," observed Dennis with some irony.

"Did I not? Well—he has several, according to the real country he is in. But since you are interested, his name is the Graf Carl von Wehlen, and I have known him a long time—quite ten years."

"Yet you are not married to him? Sure of that?"

"Quite. If it were so, I would have told you before this, and I should be a German subject."

"True. What then—exactly—is he to you? I'd like to know."

Alixe hesitated as if she was thinking it over. Then:

"That is hard to say," she answered. "I did care for him once—I cared for him more than anything in Heaven or on earth. I would have done anything for him—anything—gone to hell for him! And yet—I hated him also, and sometimes now I don't know whether I loved or hated him most." Her eyes wavered.

"But you are bound to him—that is his ring you wear?"

"No—he put it on; but it is an—an official ring; do you understand?" She raised her eyes again, and they looked at each other almost like strangers.

"Go on—I have answered your question. What next?"

"Was he one of the two men with whom I saw you this afternoon?"

"He was not. At the moment I do not know where he is."

"Then, who were they, and what were you doing?"

"That," said Alixe, "is a question I cannot answer—" and still her eyes met his—"and that you, without authority, have no right to ask."

"I am not asking officially, and I know I have no authority, and only the right of a man who has loved you for years—before this damnable war ever started—and

whose one and greatest desire in life is to marry you. Alixe—you *must* tell me!"

"I have nothing to tell." She shook her head. "I asked you not to follow me—to leave me alone. I told you that you must not interfere with me, nor my work, and—if you have followed me, and found anything out, I cannot help you. But I have nothing to say about it for the present—I could not speak, even if I wished to. I am bound——" and just for a second her eyes flashed round the room as if she were looking to see that no one lurked in the corners or listened at the doors, of which, as he had observed, there were three.

"Is your German friend—or lover—in England?" asked Dennis, coldly and steadily. "It was perhaps he who telephoned me?"

"I don't think it was," a shadow flickered across her face, "and really, Dennis, if it were so," she laughed faintly, "would you expect me to answer and tell you?"

"Yes, I should," was his reply. "I expect, and intend you to tell me the whole truth tonight, Alixe. I shall not use the information so far as it concerns you—of that you may be sure. But I *must* know everything before I leave."

"Before, or *when,* or *if,* you leave!"

"What do you mean—why should I not leave?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I hope you will—I should be sorry if anything happened to you. But you ought to know that you are not dealing with fools, Dennis. You are up against some of the cleverest brains in Europe, and—desperate at that. You should have listened to the telephone message and stayed away—you would have been wiser."

"It was that which determined me to come. Somebody wanted to keep me away, and I wasn't having any. We are an obstinate lot, we English! What do you think is likely to happen to me? You don't imagine I go unarmed, do you? We don't on this coast these days, you know—

and I'm not a fool. I shouldn't be likely to come to a house like this without protection. Besides, I have not come here officially, nor to report even that you are using electricity against orders—I came to hear from your own lips if what is said of you is true. And if you deny it, Alixe—I will take your word."

Alixe stood up straight.

"It would be useless to deny what is obvious," she replied. "I serve my country—if you know what that means."

Again their eyes met, and now his were the first to turn away. It was impossible—impossible!

"But you tell me that you are a British subject by birth?" His voice sounded oddly detached, as if it did not belong to him. "Am I then to understand that you are a traitor to your own country? For that is what it appears to be."

"Yes—it does look like it, doesn't it?" said Alixe politely. "But you forget that my mother was German, and she had no cause to love England. You see, I have two passports—my official one is German—so that I can pass into both countries. You can't think how interesting it is—I spent last Christmas in Berlin!"

"An international spy!" Dennis laughed shortly. "So that is what you are—now I have it! I've heard of them—beautiful and accomplished women generally, who manage to get these passports, and travel between countries which are at war. And you are in their ranks!"

"Well—what would you? You wanted to know. Now are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied! My God!" He gave a short, hard laugh; for in that minute he hated her as much, and more, than he had ever loved her; because he had cared so much—had worshiped a tawdry idol that he had believed to be gold—because he had been a blind fool.

Everyone else—his mother, Cicely, Lennox, Jack Eden, and even the young officers in the hotel dining-room this

evening—they all knew, guessed, or suspected; while he had gone on believing.

It was not even the one thing! She was not even the girl he had believed her—good and pure.

"An international spy!" he repeated, "and the mistress of this German, Carl von Wehlen—is that it? I begin to understand now, how it was you were so sympathetic with poor Jean—you understood."

"Yes." Alixe winced, but smiled on. "I understood. It takes a—a bad woman to be generous sometimes. Sympathy and charity are things we learn as we go through the dark parts of life—things which good people like you, and good and saintly women, do not know. They judge—they don't understand."

"I might have guessed from *that,*" he turned away, took up a cigarette and lit it with deliberation, "if I hadn't been such a fool about you. But—I was blind! I worshiped you as something utterly different to what apparently you are—as a good woman! My God! I wouldn't have believed it except from your own lips."

"No—I don't believe you would." She laughed a little, half-sadly. "But now you know! I came to England in 1913—twelve months before the war was declared—in the German secret service. We knew the war was coming, and we were prepared for it. Well—what are you going to do now, Dennis? Return to the camp, and report to headquarters?"

"No."

"That is your duty as a British officer."

"I know my duty, but it does not entail reporting you—a woman! I'll get you away first, Alixe—that is what I came for, to take you away. Get your coat and whatever is necessary—my car is here, and I can have you out of this district before daylight. Then, if what you say is true, and you have a German passport, you can leave the country possibly. If not, I will marry you, and make you a British subject over again by doing so."

"What! Would you marry a German spy, Dennis?" She smiled at him. "No—if that is what you believe me, and it is so, then your duty to your country is to hand me over to the authorities. Yes—" she stopped him as he was about to speak—"your country should come first, even before your love. If the situation were reversed, I should hand *you* over."

"Possibly you would—women are harder and crueller than men—but I simply couldn't do it. Military law knows no sex, and you might—who knows—be brought to trial and shot. No—I'm afraid they would hang you, Alixe, for you are not only a spy, but a traitor. And you stand there calmly, and think I could be responsible for your capture!"

"Yes," unhesitatingly, "for your country—why not? But I can't run away, Dennis; I must see it through. I am tied and bound."

"By this German—von Wehlen!"

"No—by honor, and the word I have given. Didn't you take an oath of allegiance, Dennis, when you joined the Army? So did I, when I elected voluntarily to serve my country. 'Not self, nor love, nor life, nor death shall come between me and the country that I serve'."

"You make little of death." He looked at her with unwilling admiration. "But you may be caught—yet."

She laughed. "What of it? It is the first thing we learn; and we expect it."

He wondered if she was really above fear, or merely acting a part.

"Well—it's not going to happen to you," he said. "I'm determined to get you out of it—you are coming with me tonight, so get a coat. I don't admire your instincts nor your treachery, but you are a woman, and I can't help loving you in spite of it all; so I won't see you taken and brought to trial. Come with me, Alixe, and let me try at least to get you away."

She stood still and shook her head.

"No, Dennis—no, I can't. I wish—I wish I could, but it's all impossible. *You* go—you still have time—straight back to the Cliff Hotel and stay there. I don't know who telephoned you, but I am afraid. Oh, Dennis—go quickly, or perhaps you won't be able to!"

"Not without you," said Dennis doggedly. "I came for you, and I won't leave you here. Come along," he caught her by the arm, "I'll take you away now, tonight, and then return and round up your friends."

"That is where you are mistaken," said a quiet voice behind them.

There was a gasp and a strangled cry from Alixe, and he saw her eyes. They were fixed now upon the door behind him (not the one by which he had entered) and were filled with sheer terror.

Swinging round, Dennis saw that a man had entered noiselessly, and was standing there.

CHAPTER EIGHT

OVER a gulf of three solid years of war they looked at each other again, while Alixe strove to pull herself together.

"So we meet again!" exclaimed Carl von Wehlen; and he clicked his heels together, bowed, and saluted. "And you were foolish enough to take no heed of my message! I knew you would not—" he smiled—"that was why I telephoned. I knew you would come straight here—where we could see what you were doing."

"So it was you who telephoned," said Dennis. "I had an idea that I had heard your voice before. And you," he turned to Alixe with contempt, "you lied to me even tonight, when you told me that you did not know whether this friend of yours was in England or not, nor who it was that telephoned me not to come. It was just a trap to get me here."

"No—" Alixe found her voice, but it was not quite steady—"I did not know, and—I did not expect you, Carl. I did not know you were in England." Suddenly she lapsed into the German language:

"What does it mean—why are you here? And why did you telephone him?"

"Do you think, *meine Liebe,* that we do not watch you?" was the quiet answer. "We have had our eyes on this man for some time, and he is too much in love with you to be safe tonight. Something might leak out, and he might have come at the wrong moment; so it was advisable that he should be already here and kept quiet. Oh—do not be angry; we will not hurt him if he behaves well. He can stay here till morning, but he knows just a little too much."

"If you harm him, I will not take you through the passage—no, not whatever you do to me."

"You will obey orders; but we will try to meet your wishes because you are a useful ally. Also, we do not particularly want to kill your—friend. In fact, we might find a better use for him. And I? Oh, yes—I have been in England some little time, but I am returning with the *Herrschaften* tonight, and so are you."

"You will never get there *without* me—no one knows the passage but Meyerling and myself; and he has gone. He—" her lip curled—"was afraid when it came to it. But you must let Captain Armitage go unharmed."

Von Wehlen looked at Dennis with raised eyebrows and a smile.

"Perhaps—perhaps," he answered, and then in English: "But be seated, Captain Armitage—the entertainment is not yet at an end, and we cannot yet bid you adieu. Be seated, and we will drink a glass of wine together."

"What is to prevent my leaving the house now?" Dennis turned to Alixe. "And why do you want me here?"

"It is not my doing." She shrugged her shoulders. "I did not telephone, and you came of your own free will. I have warned you before this not to do so, but you would not listen. As to leaving—our servant here has orders to pass nobody, in or out, tonight; and he is armed, and will keep to that. We have a party, you see, and we do not want any unexpected or unwelcome guests. So I am afraid, as you are here, you must remain. Yes," as he looked at the window, "but it is barred and shuttered. We take no chances."

"I see. I must certainly congratulate you, Miss—or is it Fräulein?—Helm (that is what they called you at the hotel tonight). You certainly honor your profession. But I think you would be wise not to kill me—it might be awkward."

"It would not be awkward, because no one would know until it was too late," said Alixe calmly. "We cannot risk

our plans going wrong, can we, Carl?" And she smiled at him, while Dennis noticed that her eyes, instead of watching him, were fixed upon the new-comer, to whom she handed a box of cigarettes, taking one herself as she did so.

Then to Dennis—saying with a smile for him now:

"You see—we are having a German house-party tonight, *Nicht wahr,* Carl? A little party from Burbridge Hall, and two or three gentlemen from other parts of the country as well. They find England has been rather hot this summer, and so they are anxious to leave for the more salubrious climate of our Fatherland. They, and I, leave tonight at midnight for a submarine which is lying off this coast waiting for us—one of our U-boats, you know, that do so much damage! There is a boat too—what was it we said a little while ago?" She laughed. "A path—a cliff—a cave—a beach—and, a boat! What an adventure! You can stay here and look after the house, Dennis, when we have gone."

Dennis nodded, thinking—desperately thinking, and getting no further. Von Wehlen was watching him too.

"But, meanwhile, we may as well be happy while we wait," went on Alixe. "What about some coffee—or champagne, Carl? There is plenty in the house. Let us drink to the success of our adventure; and to our country and her success!"

She laughed a little wildly, and her eyes shone.

"Certainly," answered Carl. "I will see about it myself, for it would not do to take Dermot away from the door. I have an idea, my sweet Alixe, that the house is watched by somebody. Perhaps your friend here can tell us——"

"No—that has nothing to do with me," said Dennis. "I trusted Miss Gerard, like a fool, and I came to see her, and not in any sense officially. But if it is watched, I can soon find out," and he whipped out his revolver and moved one step to the door. But it was one step only, for he faced von Wehlen's deadly little automatic as he turned.

"No—you must not do that," he said, "it would make a noise; and tonight we want no noise. Put that revolver down on the table—or will you take it from him, Alixe?"

"Be wise, Dennis, and put it down." Alixe's voice was very still. "If you keep your head and be quiet, we shall not hurt you—I will see to that. But we are four to one, and all of us armed; and at the slightest sound you will die. Also, it will not help your people outside, for if they got in they would find nothing, and no one. We have been preparing for this for weeks, and all is too well arranged for us to risk anything. Put your revolver on that writing-table, and sit down. The champagne, Carl! I find this thirsty work."

She turned to him with a laugh. "I will look after our visitor, don't you worry; and I will entertain him so well that he will not want to leave!"

Dennis was reminded of a sentence he had once heard in France—spoken by a young officer who had found himself in a particularly tight place:

"I'd about as much chance as a snowball in hell!"

That was precisely how much chance of life he had, unless he was quiet, and waited for some opportunity. To attempt to fight his way out would be useless, because he realized that Alixe had spoken true when she said they were desperate and clever. But how, he wondered, had it happened that this plot had been hatched, and this escape, of what was evidently a whole batch of spies with information, had been possible right under the nose, as it were, of the camp?

Why had old Meyerling been allowed to live here and looked upon as harmless? Ah—but was he? He recollected Lennox saying to him that it would be wiser to keep clear of Blecton Park and not be too anxious to accept invitations there. Then Lennox, whom he had guessed to be Acting-Intelligence Officer, had known something! But—how much?

Was it possible that somebody was watching this place

even now? If only he could make a signal! But how—with these two with him all the time?

He looked at them—Alixe, still in his eyes fair, young, and sweet in her simple black dress, one hand holding a small automatic half behind her; then to the man—a sinister shadow in the background—the instigator and master spy.

"You blasted Hun!" he cried—and fired——

At the same instant the lights went out, and he felt his arm knocked up so that he knew his shot went wide of the mark. Then, before he could fire again, his revolver was wrested from him, and his arms caught from behind, and held.

There was a hard but unequal struggle for a minute, and then he was forced into a chair, and felt himself, in the pitch darkness, being tied to the back.

When the lights went up he found he was alone with Alixe, and the men, for obviously there had been two of them, had gone, although he had heard no door open or close.

But then, he recollected confusedly, he had not heard Carl von Wehlen enter the room before.

Alixe was seated at the table, writing; and she neither moved, stopped, nor looked up.

"Listen," she said very quietly. "I am trying to help you. You should not have done that, for it may cost you your life. I will do what I can, but if your men are watching the house, and your shot was heard, Carl will kill you. Every word we say, and have said, may be overheard—I do not know. This house is full of eyes and ears tonight, but I alone know the secret of the underground passage to the shore, and where it comes out—I have spent weeks finding it—and I alone can lead these men. Therefore I do not think they will kill you, unless you make it necessary. Be quiet, and drink the wine which Carl is bringing. Here—" she pushed a knife across to him— "when we have gone, that door—" she nodded towards the one by

which the men had entered—"leads to a store-room, and you can get through the window; but if you value your life, do not move until the house is quiet."

"You expect me to sit here like a trussed bird, then, looking at a knife?" asked Dennis with supreme contempt. "What do you take me for—one of your own people? If you'll push that knife an inch nearer so that I can reach it, and cut these ropes, I'll show you how quiet I can be! God! Alixe—I never could have believed it of you! I thought you were at least a 'sport'. Here I am—one to I don't know how many—and you won't even give me a fair chance. Hand me my revolver!"

"No—I dare not!" She shook her head, and her voice was scarcely more than a breath now. "These doors, Dennis—I do not know who is watching—listening—and they watch me too, all the time. No—there is only one hope for you, Dennis—sense and silence now. Your revolver is in this drawer, but wait."

She went on writing, and Dennis ground his teeth, unable to move hand or foot, and cursing himself for a fool ever to have come like this, alone.

Then von Wehlen entered the room again, followed by a bullet-headed German carrying a tray with champagne and glasses.

"So—so," said the former, motioning him to put it down. "That is well—and we must not be too long, *meine Liebe,* for all our party is now assembled, and I am still thinking that someone watches us from without. If they heard that shot, however, they took no notice—that is well too, for otherwise I must have silenced your—friend." He looked at Dennis as if weighing him in the balance. "Shall I kill him?" he questioned Alixe. "It would be safer."

Alixe shook her head. She had risen from the table, and now crossed the room where Dennis could not see her. She said something in German, and the men laughed, and seemed amused. They poured out the wine, and drank it

greedily—toasting their Fatherland, and saying: *"Hoch der Kaiser!"*

They pressed Dennis to drink, but he refused; and then Alixe brought him her own glass.

"Drink with me, Dennis," she begged, and put the glass to his lips, for his arms were still bound.

He looked into her eyes, bright now and no longer blank, and wondered how ever he could have loved her. His thoughts rushed chaotically to the sunk hospital ship and his friend's death—to many other horrible and inhuman acts which had no part with honest warfare. He remembered her telling him that she had even lost friends in the *Lusitania;* and yet—this man was her lover and her master —this spy—this blasted Hun!

Love and hate warred within him, and he turned his head away not to see her fairness, her eyes, and the lips he had so long coveted.

"Drink," urged Alixe—her eyes fixed upon him.

"Drink, my friend!" said Carl von Wehlen, "or we shall be obliged to make you. If he will not take it at your hand, Alixe, allow me to come; but I shall not be so gentle! And be quick—we have no time to lose."

Dennis drank "damnation to the Fatherland," and to every "blasted Hun," and emptied the glass amid a roar of laughter, in which Alixe joined.

She set down the glass on the table, and with the same movement pushed the knife to the edge of it, so that it lay there with the blade open towards him.

"Now I am ready," she said; and the three of them walked to the door. Then Alixe came back. She bent over, and kissed Dennis. "Good-by," she murmured. "Perhaps you'll forgive me some day." He did not reply, but his eyes answered "Never!"

. . . . .

He must have waited several minutes, and already he felt sleep creeping over him and knew what they had done, and what Alixe's last gift to him had been. He was stiff

and cramped; but if he was going to get away, and, as he hoped, give the alarm, he must act immediately. So, with an effort which seemed each succeeding second to become greater, because of the creeping sense of tiredness and sleep, he managed to cut the rope which bound him, and free himself.

Then to the door with dragging footsteps, through the passage she had told him of, to the store-room where he found a small window which was neither barred nor shuttered.

He pushed it open and looked out. The fog was lifting now, but it was very dark, and for a second or two he stood wondering where he was. Then faint outlines told him that this window overlooked the ruins and was not very high from the ground.

He felt the cold damp air, and suddenly his head became light, and everything swam round him in a mist. He grasped his revolver which he had taken from the drawer, and dropped to the grass beneath.

It was not far, but the ground seemed to rise up and hit him between the eyes. And that was the last Dennis Armitage knew about that night.

. . . . .

In the misty gray light of an autumn morning, they brought Alixe and her several companions by car to the Eastern Command Headquarters.

It had been plain sailing as far as the exit of the underground passage into the cave beneath the towering cliff—there was the submarine waiting out at sea—and there was the small rowing boat ready to take them to it; but there was one thing upon which even Carl von Wehlen had not reckoned—a dapper little British officer, one hundred per cent efficiency and "pep," and a special squad of men who waited in the cave to greet them on their arrival; while another squad raided Blecton Park, and the house and grounds were searched.

Only one man escaped. Two were shot dead, but Carl

von Wehlen plunged into the sea, and swam out into the darkness, pursued by shots.

The men were removed from headquarters in closed cars, but the woman spy was brought before two rather weary-looking British officers in khaki, who had been up all night over this little affair.

Major Lennox woke up at once, however, and listened with interest to the dapper little officer's report of the capture—his black eyes looking all the while at the slim figure.

He waited until it was all finished, and the lieutenant had left the room. Then:

"I believe I had the pleasure of meeting you in Berlin last winter," he said. "I have not been back in England myself very long."

"It might be so," she answered calmly. "I was in Berlin at Christmas. Yes—I think I heard your name—an English milord. Well?"

Lennox rose to his feet, and placed a chair for her.

"Won't you sit down?" he suggested. "You must be tired and cold. The mornings begin to get chilly now the summer is over, especially when one has been up all night on the cliffs and beach. Yet it is warm in here, *Fräulein,* so will you not take off your cloak?" And with deft fingers he slipped it off her shoulders, revealing her in her straight black silk dress, through the thin sleeve of which could be seen the glimmer of the gold bracelet she wore.

He dropped the coat and his hand touched it.

"I thought so. May I look at your bangle? I have a good memory for faces, and when I saw you in Mundesley village, I thought I was not mistaken." He waited while she obediently turned up her sleeve, unclasped the bracelet, and handed it to him to examine.

"We are honored, *Fräulein!*" he said with a smile. "The famous Alixe Helm, isn't it? I was told to look out for her."

CHAPTER NINE

DENNIS wakened in hospital, and wondered what on earth had happened. He was wrapped in blankets, and enjoyed a splitting headache; but feeling himself over, he could find no bandages, nor any damage.

The R.M.O. was unable to assist him either, when he came in. It was midday, and the sun was shining through the remnant of last night's fog.

"They raided Blecton Park last night," he told him, "and some time in the early hours of this morning you were found lying insensible in the grounds. You had evidently been there some hours, for you were wet through; and apparently you had been drugged—but how you got there, or why, I can't tell you. Your car was in the drive—that was the only clue. You can probably supply the rest to your O.C."

"Yes—I remember now." It came back to him. "I was inside, and jumped from the window after they left; but it was not even high. Did you say that I had been drugged?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But I had nothing to drink—yes, I had." That recollection, too, came back. "They made me drink a glass of champagne just at the last——"

(That glass—Alixe's own glass which she had held to his lips! Her last gift to him!)

"What was the result of the raid?" he asked.

"Oh—bagged the lot of them," answered the doctor. "It was all planned. I don't know any details—and you'd

better sleep off the effect of that stuff they gave you, and not worry for a few hours."

"There was a woman among them," persisted Dennis, "a girl. Did they take her too?"

The R.M.O. looked hard at him, and understood quite a lot. He had seen her about too.

"Yes—they got the girl all right," he answered. "She was the brain, I understand. Two men were shot dead, and one escaped into the sea and swam out. He must have been drowned. See you later."

. . . . .

"What would they do with her?" he asked himself, as he tried in vain to sleep again. Anyway, he would never hear, for that sort of information was never disclosed. He could make sure that she had been captured, but that would be all.

Didn't they hang or shoot spies, irrespective of sex? And was she not practically the leader? He wondered what had happened to Carl von Wehlen—had he been one of the two shot, or had he been the one to escape? And how had it been done?

He wondered again why nothing had been said to him about going there that night, and what sort of an inquiry he would have to face. Yet—Blecton Park had not been forbidden, nor out of bounds at any time.

Lennox had warned him, but that was all; and there was therefore nothing out of the ordinary in his being there. Also, the Colonel knew about it, and had told him there was no reason why he should not accept old Meyerling's invitations.

He wondered where "old Meyerling" was. Got safe away to Holland or Germany, he supposed. "What a lot of blind fools we must be," he thought, "to have let him go, and not guessed."

He fell asleep thinking again of Alixe.

. . . . .

Two days later he saw his Colonel; but to his surprise, nothing was said about it; and even when he inquired, the Colonel looked bored and seemed to know very little.

"Oh, yes—of course, they raided Blecton Park," he said. "Always a risky business going to a house like that when you aren't sure of your host—in France once, I remember——"

"But didn't we know?" asked Dennis when the story was ended and he could get a word in. "We must have known."

"Know? Of course we knew—we'd been watching the house for weeks; but it disarmed them when you boys went there to dine. All the same—it was your lucky night, Armitage, for I wonder Fritz left you to tell the tale. He doesn't usually, and a knife in your back would be more like him than putting you to sleep with a glass of what I have no doubt was excellent champagne. They always have the best," he sighed, "and I'm told Meyerling had some fine wine in his cellars."

It was obvious to Dennis that there was nothing to be got out of him—even if he knew.

"You were warned, however, when it got hot, were you not?" asked the Colonel suddenly. "I passed the command to warn anyone in the habit of visiting there."

"Yes, I was, thanks, sir," Dennis smiled ruefully, "and took no notice. Is Major Lennox still here, sir? He had to do with the raid, I believe."

"Oh, no—no! Major Lennox is away on a special commission. I do not think he could give you any information, however, even if he were here."

. . . . .

There was the young officer who had effected the capture on the beach, and he was more loquacious, and had no objection to telling the story again—embellished with any further information he had.

"Old Meyerling? No—they caught him at Harwich—

were waiting for him in fact. Why—these German chaps think they are good spies! But they can't touch us—we knew all about this weeks ago, and have been sitting down watching them, giving them rope, so to speak, until we could get them all together. There were about ten of them, including the lady, living in our midst—posing as naturalized Englishmen, Dutch or Danes—but they aren't really clever, and we have rounded up the lot now. I really enjoyed it, you know—it was the neatest thing I've done, and they hadn't a chance. We had 'em covered at the entrance to the cave, and they walked into our arms. You know who the lady was? The famous Fräulein Helm—a well-known spy. I don't know what they'll do with her—shoot her probably! It seems rather a pity, for she was damned pretty. I couldn't see much of her, for she kept her face covered—I took her to the headquarters and handed her over——"

Dennis heard no more, though he was aware that the other's voice went on. When he could, he went out and walked for miles along the cliffs, wondering if life was worth living, and knowing now how Jean must have felt.

When he returned to his billet at the hotel in the evening, there was a telegram waiting for him.

The War Office, with that disagreeable suddenness which they seemed bound to affect, ordered him to report in London without delay.

. . . . .

A week later he left England for Mesopotamia.

Part Four

THE END OF IT

CHAPTER ONE

AUGUST, 1918—and now the War had dragged on for four long years.

England was still carrying on with indomitable spirit, but everywhere were hospitals now; and the streets of all the towns saw wounded and disabled men in blue and gray uniforms; officers with their blue arm-bands—silver medals of discharge. There were more uniforms to be seen now than civilian clothes, and almost every doctor was in khaki, and attached to a local Red Cross hospital.

And all the while food and fuel was scarce and growing less, and more restricted and rationed every day.

Still—England laughed, and London was gay. The night life went on; the theaters, music-halls, and restaurants were full. Those who could not go out helped as they could at home, gave of their best and utmost to keep things going, to give the men on leave a good time as far as possible, and to teach the children philosophy and endurance for the glory of their country.

There was little mourning worn, but few families now from which toll had not been taken.

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A large corner house in Berkeley Square, which in private life and peace-time had been Clareville House, was now an officers' hospital loaned and equipped by the Earl of Clareville—and thence they took Dennis Armitage in July, 1918.

He had been bundled home from Mesopotamia in a hospital ship, badly wounded and ill, and bearing in mind that he had been several times mentioned in des-

patches, had the Military Cross, and was now recommended for a D.S.O., they alloted him to one of the most exclusive hospitals in London where he had a room to himself, and which was in charge of Doctor Weston, who had served two years of the War in the field hospitals of Flanders and France, and in the front line.

Captain Armitage was not, however, expected to occupy his room long; for from his arrival he was looked upon as an almost hopeless case. He had been lying out, wounded, for forty-eight hours before the stretcher-bearers found him; he had been ill with dysentery, and the long voyage had exhausted most of the little chance of life which he had left.

There was one person in the hospital, however, who never gave up hope while there was life; and that was the senior sister, Nurse Leighton, who for years before the War had been a man's nurse, and who had been offered this post after three years in France, where her peace-time reputation had been added to by hundreds of men who had come under her charge in the Base hospitals.

Like Dr. Weston, Nurse Leighton's heart was with the troops in action, and she had loved the work in the fighting line; but she, too, had come home, not only to rest (if rest it could be called) from such strenuous work, but also to make room in the field for younger and fresher helpers who were awaiting their chance to prove themselves.

And both friends of the Clareville family, they had come together to Clareville House.

So: "Leave him to me, Dr. Weston," said the sister. "Perhaps I can save him yet—I've done it before when it has seemed hopeless."

. . . . .

To Dennis Armitage, life had been a series of impressions crowded one upon another; but not a single fact, because nothing seemed real or tangible.

He came to the conclusion, however, in convalescence, that most of the War, or his share or aspect of it, was a series of impressions from beginning to end—some startlingly vivid, some curiously vague—and all idea of what ought under the circumstances to happen, very rarely did so.

He ought—he was sure of that afterwards—to have been killed by that particular shell which burst, as it seemed, in front of him; and in the few seconds of fire and smoke he knew that he was not sorry that the end had come. He was tired of war and fighting—tired of "Mespot," the heat, the flies, and the fever—and he was tried of life without Alixe, who, whether she lived or was dead, could never be his now.

There was another man with him named Joyce. Afterwards he could not remember even who Joyce was, for they were not in the same company; but they had fought side by side for all that day with the guns, and then Joyce had been killed, and he found himself looking at him, and wondering why he had been left.

Probably Joyce had a wife and family at home—he was a much older man than Dennis—while he had nobody except his mother, who, if she had loved him, had never shown it nor told him so.

Some time later—he had no idea how long after, nor what had happened in between—the R.A.M.C. men had found them, and the impression changed to the inside of a field hospital.

It was hot and airless, voices disturbed him, and he was staring at the brassy-looking Eastern sky through a hole in what had been the roof.

"Poor old Joyce," someone was saying. "I liked Joyce. I wonder what happened——"

Dennis had a clear recollection then of sitting up and attempting to give a graphic account of the attack in order to vindicate himself, because Joyce had been killed and he had not.

That ended the impression of Mesopotamia.

. . . . .

And then the sea—days and days, and nights and nights—darkness, and the noise of the waves and wind. Swinging cots, and swift-footed, gentle-handed nurses and doctors, fleeting impressions and dreams; wonderful dreams in which Alixe was always there and never left him. She called him: "Dennis dear!" danced to him, smiled, sang, and laughed. And Alixe was dead!

And then, one day, he wakened in a small room in the officers' hospital in Berkeley Square.

. . . . .

It was very hot in London that August, and even in the room facing east, with the open windows and the swaying silk curtains, it seemed stifling. There was an electric fan; but it only worked when he was asleep and too exhausted to notice it, otherwise his nerves would not stand either the sight or sound of it.

There were flowers always there, for somebody came every day to visit him. He seldom saw them, however, for Sister Leighton attended to it that he was not worried by an over-anxious family after one day, when, in a conscious moment, he had seen his mother at his bedside, and had implored "Sister" to send them all away.

"Don't let anybody come," he had begged her. "Let me be alone."

"Not even your mother, Boy?" (She called them all "Boy.")

"No, certainly not the Mater. No!"

"Nor—" (Sister had to remember the name of the fair-haired, neatly-dressed lady who accompanied Mrs. Armitage every visit and called her "Auntie.") "Nor Cicely? You don't want Cicely?"

"No, no! Not Cicely—don't let her come! I want Alixe, but she won't come. I don't want anyone else."

So Sister Leighton put them off every time.

"He isn't so well today," she would say. "He had a bad night, and wants sleep." Or: "I shouldn't go up today, he has had a lot of pain, and is better left alone."

They were not satisfied, for they knew how ill he was; but it was useless arguing with this lady of the lamp; so they left their flowers and went away hoping for another day; while Dennis lay upstairs and let life pass by and slip away without caring. He had lost his arm. Well, what did that matter? Alixe had lost her life!

And how he hated those flowers which Sister, who loved them, arranged so carefully and with such exquisite taste in his room where he had to see them all day—roses, carnations, sweet peas——

"Why don't they send poppies?" he asked angrily, waking suddenly to a new, huge mass of carnations. "Poppies and cornflowers would be suitable, and Alixe loved them; but not those things which are sold in shops and come out of hothouses."

"I'll try and get you some poppies if you'd like them," said Sister. "And who is Alixe? I have not seen her."

Dennis did not answer; and apparently he forgot about the poppies, for next day he was worse, and had no interest in anything.

Mrs. Armitage, grown old and gaunt, with snow-white hair and a lined face, came two or three times a week. She was alone at Longmead now, for Phyllis has astonished the family by marrying a "Padre," and had gone to live near the camp where he was ministering. She had not even troubled about her mother being left alone, for: "It is my life, isn't it?" she had said. "I shall be here for ever if I don't take the opportunity to get away; and you will never allow me to have friends, nor work, like other women do. I am thirty-one, and it is my last chance, for there won't be enough men to go round after the War is over."

So Cicely—and she was thirty-two now—had to try

and look after her father and Aunt Augusta as well; and coming home, she went to Longmead so that she could accompany her aunt on her every visit to the hospital.

Mrs. Armitage was not satisfied with her son's progress, and she told Dr. Weston so. She declared that it was too hot in London, that the noise of the streets worried him, and she was sure he would have a better chance if he could be taken home as soon as it was possible to move him. There must be an ambulance and two nurses (quite unprocurable at that time had she realized it), and he should have a ground-floor room at Longmead House.

"He can't be moved at present," said Dr. Weston shortly, because he was busy, and "Mothers" kept him talking unnecessarily and at length. "He is barely holding his own from day to day, and the shock of moving would kill him."

"He must want to come home," repeated his mother. "These places are very nice, but not comfortable like home; and an ambulance——"

"Absolutely impossible at present," repeated Weston.

He told Sister Leighton what she had suggested; and one day the Sister approached Dennis with the question:

"Do you want to go home?"

Dennis stared at her aghast. "Home? No, I don't. Do you mean to Longmead—my mother, and all that? *No!*"

"It might be possible if you really wanted it, and thought you would have a better chance of getting well there."

"But I don't!" and for a fleeting second Dennis smiled. "They'd worry me to death at home—the Mater and Cicely. If Jean were there, it wouldn't be so bad; but Jean is dead, and so is Alixe! Funny what a lot of them are dead, isn't it, Sister? Jack Eden, who was a great pal of mine, he went down in the hospital ship *Carinthian* when the Huns sunk her in the Mediterranean; and Jean

drowned herself when she heard that he was dead; and Alixe—no, I won't go home, I'd rather go 'West' from here. I like you and the doctor, and I'm warm and comfortable. You don't take my photographs away, nor worry me."

It was the longest coherent speech he had yet made; but Sister only nodded her head sympathetically.

"Your mother is not satified; she would like you to be nursed at home. But I will tell her that it is impossible to move you at present."

"Yes, and keep them all away. I don't want to see anybody except you," implored Dennis.

So again Sister Leighton put them off, shaking her head.

"He wouldn't stand the journey, Mrs. Armitage, he is so very weak—and no, I wouldn't go up today if I were you; he is asleep just now, and it is a pity to waken him——"

. . . . .

They told him, hoping to interest him, that he had been recommended for gallantry, and was to receive the D.S.O.; but he didn't believe them, and didn't care.

He wondered afterwards, however, whether if Alixe had got away, and gone with her party on the submarine back to Germany or wherever they were bound for, if they would have decorated her with the iron cross!

And he laughed aloud at the idea, so that the night nurse came hurrying in to see what was the matter.

They brought him the papers with his name in the list of honors, and his portrait; but he was too tired to read them, and there was only one portrait he wanted to look at—a snapshot taken four years ago in the summer of 1914, up the Thames.

Alixe with the sun shining on her, smiling and happy. Alixe, whom he had lost for ever.

CHAPTER TWO

ONE day they brought him an unexpected visitor; and Dennis looked at the dark man, a Staff Officer, and wondered vaguely where he had seen him before, and why he had come up to visit him like this.

"Lord Lennox," explained Sister Leighton, "or rather, I should say, Major Lennox, for that is what you prefer, isn't it? This is his house, Captain Armitage, and he had an idea that he knows you, and you have served together."

Queer recollections rushed over Dennis like a film picture. Dark nights—sea—cliffs—Jean's funeral at Elverstrand—Alixe——

He shut his eyes quickly, trying to blot it out.

"Yes, I thought so," exclaimed Lennox. "We were both on the East Coast last summer, and attached to the same unit. A God-forsaken spot it was—I never felt so fed-up!" He took up the limp hand on the cover. "I was looking at the list of patients up in the hall, and I saw your name and wondered if it were the same. Quite a war coincidence that they should bring you to Clareville House! Had a bad time, haven't you?"

"He's been through it," said the Sister. "He came from Mespot. I wonder they sent him home: but, of course, he is finished as far as the War is concerned, and they are beginning to clear them out now. I don't think he recognizes you, Major Lennox."

"Yes, I do now." Dennis opened his eyes again. "But it all seems such a long time ago. Have you been out again since last year, too?"

"No, not in any war service. When prisoners are

repatriated they are on parole not to return to the line. I was in the R.A.M.C., too—non-combatant. You were sent to Mespot, of course, weren't you?—I remember the circumstances. And I hear you have got a D.S.O.—more than I have! And you got the M.C. last winter, too! Well done!"

"I didn't do anything, and I don't remember if I did. It seems rather rot to give a man a medal for a thing he can't even remember. Won't you sit down and talk? I'm glad to see you—why didn't you come before?"

"That's a compliment to you, Major Lennox," smiled the Sister. "You are quite the first visitor whom he has asked to remain."

"Yes, sit down," repeated Dennis, "and smoke. I can't myself—I feel like nothing on earth. But I'd like to watch you, and smell tobacco again."

Lennox pulled up a chair and sat down, lighting a cigarette, and for a little while they talked about the War—or rather Lennox talked in his quiet, extraordinarily soothing voice—speaking of England, and the conditions there in the summer of 1918, of his job—and "tell me if you are tired," he added, "or go to sleep, if you like. I'm told I'm rather good at putting patients to sleep by talking to them and not expecting any reply."

"You are a gifted healer, Major Lennox," said the Sister. "I've heard that, too—in France, three years ago. You have always been a loss to the medical profession. But it will do Captain Armitage good to listen, and try to talk. He doesn't have enough visitors; he won't see them when they come."

"And I'm sick of being alone." Dennis smiled, and showed the first interest in life since his arrival. "I've lost an arm, you know."

"That's better than losing your life," answered Lennox. "Neither you nor I are going to die for Old England, dear boy; for they won't have any more of you with only one arm and a bullet wound under your heart. And even

that's better than many of these poor devils who are blind, and paralyzed. Who are your visitors?"

"Mother—sister—cousin. All women, so I can't be bothered with them. All relations——"

Lennox smiled—his whimsical smile.

"And how do you find our family mansion? This is Clareville House—my father loaned and equipped it as a sort of thank-offering, I believe, for my safe return from Germany. They have turned my room, which was the best and sunniest in the house, into the operating theater. It makes quite a decent little hospital, and I like to come and look at it, especially as Weston, who is in charge, is my best friend. Do you like him? He's a fine doctor —surgeon, you know; and a man's man."

"I like everybody here," said Dennis. "They wanted to take me home—my mother did—but I won't go. If I am going to peg out, I'll do it here. Families are so depressing, don't you think? They interfere, and *will* talk!"

"Perhaps you are right," agreed Lennox. "I think you are better here where everything is impersonal; and Sister Leighton is a good sort. I've known her, too, a long time; and, in fact, she has nursed me. We put her and Weston in charge here, knowing how capable they both were, and how well they work together. But who writes your letters?"

"No one; but there are none to write. I don't bother about them." And he glanced indifferently at a small pile of correspondence lying on a side table. "Sister reads them, or sometimes only the signatures. She wrote to my mother when I first came here."

"I see." Lennox paused to look at the patient.

"Can *I* write anything for you?" he asked then with a half-smile. "Perhaps—I'm a man—I'd understand. And I don't talk—anything you like."

Dennis understood what he left unsaid, and suddenly he remembered and grew tired. His eyes traveled past

his visitor, and fixed themselves on the patch of sky he could see through the open window, above the tall green trees of the square.

"Oh, thanks awfully!" he answered in a voice as far away as his eyes. "But there is nothing to write, and no one to write to."

Lennox rose, and put his hand on the other's.

"I see," he said again. "Well, I'll get along now. You're tired, and you have talked enough. I'll look in tomorrow again if you care to have me; I'm in London indefinitely now."

He walked out quietly, and closed the door. Then he went downstairs into the Sister's sitting-room.

"Seems a bit tired," he remarked to Sister Leighton, "so I left him. Not doing very well, is he? I don't like the look of him—what does Weston say?"

"The same as you, Major Lennox—he doesn't like the look of him. He is better than he was, of course; but he is so weak and depressed; as if he had nothing to live for. We can't interest him in anything, and there's nothing more Dr. Weston can do. He *ought* to recover, and if he would eat and sleep we see no reason why he should not; but the nurses can't tempt him with anything, and the night nurse tells me that he is hardly ever asleep when she goes round."

"I must see Weston—I can't let the man die. Something must be done—where is he?"

"Doctor Weston is not back yet. He goes to King's Hospital three afternoons a week. Let me give you a cup of tea, Major Lennox, he may be in by then; and I, too, should like to do something more, for it would be a pity to lose him—he is such a nice, good-looking boy. But there is something wrong somewhere. He won't even see his mother if he can get out of it; and I have had no end of trouble making excuses to her, for she drives up two or three times a week, bringing him all sorts of luxuries which *we* can't get—fruit and flowers, and cream

and butter. Heavens! What money will do, and get! But he isn't well enough to talk to them, and they seem to worry him. He was really upset at the suggestion that they should take him home and nurse him there."

"Hasn't he got a girl?" asked Lennox. "Every man has one, especially these days."

"There's a cousin," said the Sister doubtfully. "She comes up with Mrs. Armitage, but he doesn't want her. And she isn't a girl either—I should say she is five and thirty."

"That's no use. He must have a girl somewhere; but I remember a year ago, when we were on the East Coast, that he never had letters, nor talked like other men. We were a 'pair,' for I have no girl either. But he is young, and——" Lennox broke off, thinking of last summer. "Impossible!" he added, with a shake of his head.

. . . . .

"You're not trying to get better," he scolded Dennis on his next visit. "You're just lying there letting yourself drift. Don't you want to live?"

"No," answered Dennis, moved to frankness. "I've nothing to live for. They won't keep me in the Army with only one arm, and I shall be a crock for months—no hope of going out again as I'd love to, and have another smack at the blasted Huns! I'd live quick enough if I had a chance of that! But I haven't—it means going home and vegetating for the rest of my life, and it's not worth it."

"Life is always worth living," answered Lennox quietly. "I've been through that phase myself, when I felt there was nothing to live for, and that I couldn't go on. I've been married—my wife died while I was a prisoner in Germany. But before that I had lost the woman I loved; she was already married when I met her, and my own marriage was a mistake from start to finish. So—*I* came home to nothing but duty. But one has to carry on,

if only for tradition's sake, and the Old Country. Can't I help—there must be a girl somewhere, Armitage—where is she? Men like you are never alone—what has happened?"

"I don't know," answered Dennis; and he shut his eyes. "She may be dead—I hope she is. I don't know——" And he refused to talk any more.

. . . . .

In vain Lennox appealed to Weston.

"I can't help you, Lennox," said the doctor. "There is no reason why the man should not get better; the arm has healed, and he has no sign or symptom of shell-shock. But there it is; he doesn't want to recover, and God only knows the cause of it—I don't! We doctors can't know everything, and this sort of knowledge is beyond us."

"Well then, I must take a hand," returned Lennox, and he went upstairs two steps at a time, encountering Sister Leighton on the landing.

"And how is our patient—Armitage?" he asked.

"Our lonely soldier?" smiled the Sister. "A little better, I think. He was hoping you'd come this afternoon, but I believe he is asleep at present. Will you come in and see?"

They went into the room softly, not to awaken him. The silk curtains were drawn, and the room was cool and shadowy.

Dennis lay asleep, and in sleep looked much younger than his thirty-one years, and very tired. Lennox stood by his bedside and stared at him with real concern.

"Don't waken him on any account," he said; and then his eyes fell upon the bedside table.

It was littered with letters and papers, as if the man had been making an effort to read or write, and had fallen asleep over the attempt; and among the papers was a flat, soft leather case such as many soldier carried in their inner pockets, or their pocket-books.

Lennox had seen many such cases, and knew their contents were usually a photograph with talc to protect it; and he picked it up noiselessly, and opened it.

There were two or three letters in a feminine handwriting, a printed poem cut from a paper, and on the opposite side, the portrait of a girl in a summer dress, and a rather large, droopy hat, not of the present fashion.

And the photograph?

Sister Leighton looked over his shoulder with a smile.

"I believe that is the missing girl, Major," she whispered. "The point of the romance! He keeps that case under his pillow—it was in his pocket when he was brought in—and it was the first thing he asked for. But I have not seen it out like this before, and I am sure it was unintentional. He often has it in his hand, but I have never seen it open. Last week, however, Mrs. Armitage came unexpectedly, and insisted upon coming upstairs—you should have seen how he whisked it out of sight!"

She laughed softly and kindly; but Lennox did not smile. He just stared at the portrait in silence.

"She is very pretty, isn't she?" added the Sister.

"Yes." He set down the case noiselessly, and retreated from the room, followed by a rather astonished Sister.

"Do you know who she is?" he asked her abruptly.

"Oh, no!" answered the Sister in surprise. "When he first came in, and he was delirious, he used to talk constantly of, and ask for, somebody called Alixe—I think that was the name—so it may be her; and he always wanted and talked of poppies. I offered to try to get him some one day, he was so insistent."

"Poppies!" repeated Lennox slowly, "and Alixe! Yes, I see now. And, of course, he knew her before the War; I begin to see daylight. Any tea going, Sister?"

"In five minutes—at four o'clock. Come to my room, Major Lennox, and you shall have some; and perhaps it will help you in your problem."

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Lennox thoughtfully.

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When he returned to Dennis Armitage's room, he saw that the latter was awake. A tray stood on the table, but the photograph had disappeared.

"So good of you to come and see me like this," began Dennis. "I believe I am better; and I'm not a bit pleased about it if I am, for that means that I shall have to go from here and make room for some other poor chap, and I'm simply dreading going home. I haven't been there for nearly twelve months—since the time my little sister was drowned last September. I've been putting it off as long as possible, but I see it coming now."

"Not necessarily." Lennox lighted a cigarette. "Don't go home—it's a long way, and why? Come and stay with me instead; I've got a top-hole little flat, with a couple of spare rooms; and, if necessary, you can bring a nurse, although my man is an expert at nursing, and has done for me many a time in the almost twenty odd years we have been together. Yes, do come; I'd like you to, and I can run you over in my car."

"That's awfully good of you," said Dennis gratefully. "Of course, it's beastly of me not to want to go home, but my mother is not sympathetic—she doesn't, and never did, understand. And my cousin will be there, and—oh, Lord! I just can't! Yes, I should like to come and stay with you for a bit; I know you would leave me alone and let me do what I like. Though really, I don't like anything, nor care——"

"That is always the way he talks," sighed the Sister, entering the room in time to hear the last sentence. "Yes, you can take him, Major Lennox, as soon as he can be moved, and try your skill upon him, for ours does not seem much good. See if you can cure him."

"I believe I can," said Lennox, and he half-shut his eyes, as if reminiscing.

"You've had no tea, Armitage," he went on, "are you never hungry? Do you remember how starved we used to get up there on the East Coast? By Jove, I don't think I was ever so hungry in my life, and how it rained! And do you remember the scandal of Blecton Park, and the raid on it? *You* were mixed up in that, weren't you? I heard about it afterwards, but I left in a hurry, and never had the opportunity to ask you what you were doing there that night——"

Suddenly Dennis flung up his hand to cover his eyes, as if a spasm of pain tortured him. The Sister, with a look of alarm, stepped forward, but Lennox put a hand on her arm and held her back.

"I came across something in an old paper the other day," he continued, "which reminded me of it; and I thought at the time perhaps it would interest you, so I brought it along."

It was a portrait cut from an illustrated paper of some months ago; and under it was printed:

Received by His Majesty in private audience yesterday, GENERAL GERARD, and his daughter, ALIXE GERARD.

CHAPTER THREE

SISTER LEIGHTON looked from one to the other —at Dennis staring in amazement at the portrait in the paper, and Lennox standing by with a smile.

"It's quite all right, Sister," he said then. "You run along now, and nurse somebody else. I'm sure you have other patients who need you, and I want to stay and talk to this man about a charming girl whom apparently we both knew."

Sister Leighton nodded and left them, for she saw that Lennox had something to say.

"I thought she was dead," said Dennis when they were alone, pulling himself together. "If she is not, she ought to be, and I think I would rather that she was."

"Why on earth do you wish that? She isn't at all dead —why should she be?"

"Didn't they shoot her, or don't they shoot women spies?" asked Dennis deliberately. "She deserved it."

"That I can't tell you. They may do so—the French shoot them irrespective of sex, and so do the Germans. But they never got Alixe Helm back—we saw to that. Were you under the impression that our people might shoot her?"

"Naturally, she was at least half-German, and right in with that damned old Hun at Blecton Park and all the crowd of them there."

Lennox nodded, his black eyes on the other man's face.

"Look here. When did you last see and hear of Miss Gerard—tell me that."

"Oh, last October, that night you spoke of. I heard the result of the raid on Blecton Park, and then—well,

then I got suddenly recalled and sent to Mespot! And that was the end of it. But I was told that Miss Gerard had been captured with the others, and—and—I thought we shot spies whether they were men or women; especially if they were traitors, as she was."

"No, not that," interrupted Lennox. "A spy, I grant you, though it is a nasty word and I would rather call her a Secret Service Agent, or as being in our Government Intelligence Service; but never a traitor! Alixe Helm, or Gerard—for that is her real name—served England, and England only and always. She served, too, constantly at the risk of her life, for had the Germans got her, and found it out, they would most certainly have shot her, and been pretty merciless about it, I bet! She carried her life in her hand (or perhaps it was in those mysterious eyes; who knows?) and twice she went to Berlin for us. No, not a traitor, I think!"

"Are you telling me that Alixe was on our side?" exclaimed Dennis, forgetting that he was an invalid, and sitting up. "Look here, you know I was there. I've known her since before the War, and I tell you it's impossible!"

"It is true, nevertheless," repeated Lennox. "I can tell you the whole story if you won't get excited, and can digest it. She *was* working with, and for us—throughout. *I* had to do with that raid on Blecton Park—that is why I was at Mundesley—and I saw Miss Gerard afterwards and identified her as one of our own agents by a badge she had. Did you ever see a gold bracelet she wore high up on her left arm?"

Dennis had, and remembered it vividly: "C.W.31."

"Yes, but I always took that to be a personal thing; the initials to mean Carl von Wehlen whose name, of course, you know, and with whom she had worked."

"I do know it—yes, I can tell you that part, too. He was at the head of that little band we caught. Here—" he pulled up a chair—"have a cigarette! A smoke won't hurt you—in fact, it will soothe your nerves—and I'll tell

you what I know. Had I guessed she was a friend of yours, and that you believed she was playing traitor for all those twelve months, I would have told you before."

Dennis took a cigarette, and let him light it. He did not seem to remember that he had not smoked since he had been wounded; that part of himself became a dream, and his whole interest was now centered in the story of Alixe.

"Go on," he said urgently.

"I should begin," commenced Lennox, "by telling you that when I was a prisoner in Germany, the authorities there tried to get hold of me; thought I might be useful to them. I had a title, and money; I spoke German fluently, and understood it; I even possessed a German name, and they had some fantastic idea that my words would carry weight in the prison camps there, if I would go among the men and tell them that England was beaten —starving—finished! Having done that to their satisfaction, it was suggested that I should be released and return to England to tell a wonderful story of how strong and unbeaten Germany was; how many more million men she could put in the field, and how she could go on for another ten or twenty years if necessary, and still be *Deutschland über Alles.*

"You can guess the stuff, and what I said! But in Berlin I met Miss Fräulein Helm, as she was then, just come back from England, and the Lord only knows how they managed it, or how she dare do it! I, like everyone else, imagined her to be German, and she never undeceived me, of course, by even so much as a glance. You may therefore guess how astonished I was to hear the name again after I returned to England.

"I went to the proper quarter, and repeated what had taken place in Berlin, and asked to be put on some job which would enable me, as it were, to get a bit back on my own, as I was prohibited from any more of the actual fighting line, even as a non-combatant; and they sent me

to Mundesley to see what was doing with old Meyerling.

"Of course, we knew all along what was going on there. He had that place as a regular clearing-house for escaped prisoners, spies, and Government agents; and it is honeycombed with passages. A really most interesting old house——"

"Yes, I know that," interrupted Dennis. "But tell me about Alixe. You say her name was—or is—really Gerard, and not Helm?"

"Quite so; she is the daughter of General Gerard, and I drove her to their country house near Bury St. Edmunds; a charming old spot called 'Little Hollow'. Her mother's name was Helm—she was Cora Helm, a famous dancer in the 'nineties; and I understand that her daughter was brought up entirely in Germany with her mother's people, and only came to England a year before the war broke out. *They* sent her over here as a spy—into her own father's household—telling her to serve her country, and forcing her to keep an oath she had taken: 'With God, for Emperor and Fatherland'.

"But apparently they overlooked the fact that Alixe Gerard was really British—her father an officer in our Army, and England her fatherland. So, she did serve her country; but it was never Germany."

"Most extraordinary and incredible!" murmured Dennis. "She always insisted that she was British, but I don't think that I, or anyone who knew her over here, really believed it. Evidence was so dead against her."

"She wanted it to be, and played for it so that the Germans who employed and controlled her would give her full freedom and confidence. She never even hinted it to you?"

"Never! Not even that night when—" Dennis laughed a little, and bitterly—"she allowed those damned Germans to truss me up like a fowl, and then gave me drugged champagne out of her own glass! I knew she had put something into it, but they forced me to drink it, even if it

had been poison. Oh, it's hard to believe, you know, that if Alixe had been British she would have done that to me; because we were old friends. It is not as if I was a stranger to her whom she had met for the first time in the camp at Mundesley—I knew her before the War when she was dancing at the Karina Hotel. Jack Eden introduced me to her."

"Yes, I understood she had been there. The 'Karina' was a hot-bed of foreign spies before the War, and was afterwards closed as a hotel, as perhaps you know, and turned into a Government office. And Miss Gerard was, I presume, on that job, watching them from our side. I know she was in our service before the War. She told me so herself, and so did her father."

"But—that damned German, Carl von Wehlen," said Dennis, "she was working with him! She was—I asked her straight out what he was to her, and she admitted it; how do you get over that?"

"I don't. It may have been true, or it may not! It may have been genuine, and before she came to England; or it may have been a put-up thing to get hold of him. She was a finished actress; she stopped at nothing to gain her own ends, and she was one of the cleverest women in our service, or that I have ever known. You admit that she even deceived you; and it must have been pretty hard to do that—under the circumstances."

"Oh, there were no circumstances," retorted Dennis, understanding what the other had left unsaid. "I never flattered myself that she cared for me. Still, if she was British, and so was I, and she allowed me to go there that night——"

"But *did* she allow it, or did you butt in on your own without asking? I had an idea you were off to Blecton Park when I saw you that night bolting out of the hotel as if a tank was behind you! I wanted to warn you again to keep clear, but you didn't stop. And I don't suppose, if you had, that you would have listened to me."

"Nor do I," admitted Dennis. "Anyway, Carl von Wehlen was there that night, with Alixe in the house. It was he who got me from behind, and I'm still uncertain whether or not she did not help him. He wanted to finish me, kill me and be done with it; but there, I fancy, Alixe objected, though, as they talked in German, I am still in the dark as to what they said, and agreed to do with me."

"She must have acted very well," said Lennox calmly. "My admiration of her capabilities increases. She was down at Blecton Park, getting the hang of the place as it were, and studying the geography of those passages while she attended to Meyerling's correspondence and business with 'Holland'. We knew, you see, that there came there from time to time, as visitors, business men and servants, various German agents masquerading in this country as Dutch, Danes, Swedes, and naturalized Englishmen. I don't think they did much harm; and a lot of the information which they obtained was concocted especially for them. Still, there were among them two or three men who really were dangerous, and Carl von Wehlen was one of them. He had been in and out of England by some extraordinary means throughout three years of war; he was in London during the autumn of 1914, when they could, and did, get valuable information."

"Yes, I know; I met him at Alixe's flat in October, 1914," interrupted Dennis. "That was before I was in the Army; and she introduced him as Charles Weyland. I knew he was German all the same—all her friends were, and I used to loathe them."

"I see now that you might have been of use to us," observed Lennox thoughtfully. "I did not know you knew Miss Gerard so well before the War. And yet perhaps, as things were, it would not have done for you to be mixed up in it; and evidently the authorities thought so, too, or they would not have shipped you off to Mespot in such a hurry. As I was saying, however, we wanted to get von

Wehlen, and only one person, so they thought, could trap him—Alixe Helm, who had known him——"

"Yes, I know all about that. I have told you that I knew her *well*. Go on——"

"So we set the trap at Blecton Hall, and they all walked into it. We let our men go there—even the young officers—and if they talked, it didn't matter, for it created confidence and disarmed suspicion; and we knew that not one of that German party would reach Germany until the War was a thing of the past, so there was no chance of information being passed through. We watched old Meyerling, and knew all about his business with Holland; we watched his sister, the fat lady, Mrs. Van Hoyt, and read all the letters she wrote. Oh, we played a good game there!"

"Yet you warned me," said Dennis quietly.

"Yes, *I* warned you," answered Lennox, "because you were not visiting old Meyerling and Blecton Park, but Miss Gerard; and I was not sure whether she would tell you the truth or not, and how safe it would be if she did. *You* were a nuisance, if the truth be told; but had we known exactly how much you knew, I would have roped you in, and perhaps given you a hint. Of course, when I went there, I knew nothing of this Miss Gerard; I was given her number and that name, but until I saw her I did not know it was the Fräulein Helm whom I had met in Berlin. You may imagine my astonishment—and I must admit, for a time, my own doubts—because I wondered myself which country she was serving."

"I don't think I ever had any doubt," said Dennis dryly. "If your story is true, and I suppose it must be, she acted very well. But it seems to me rather unnecessarily, especially that last night. It is very hard to excuse her drugging me with her own champagne. It was a low-down trick; she might at least have let me make a fight for it. I suppose women make good spies; they are born actresses, and accomplished liars! Well, she must have told me plenty, come to think of it!"

"Probably—it's not a very truthful profession. But I don't think she enjoyed it. You should remember, too, that she was brought up in a hot-bed of spies—her father told me so when I drove her home after that affair at Mundesley. He loathed her doing it, but he said she called it her 'atonement' for coming to England in the first place in the service of the German Government. She knew so much about them and their methods, that she really wanted to remain in that line of business, and pay them back for what they had done to her; and in war-time, General Gerard told me he felt it would not be right to consider himself and his own feelings, against the good and honor of his country."

"And what became of von Wehlen?" asked Dennis. "Was he shot?"

"Von Wehlen escaped—he was the only one to do so. He swam out, and was picked up by a small boat, by which means he succeeded in reaching the submarine lying off the coast waiting for the party."

"And he got back to Germany?"

"No." Lennox smiled. "Not quite. You see, we knew that submarine was there, and one of our T.B.D.'s put a shell into her before she could submerge. And that was that!"

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Gradually coming back to normal life and health, Dennis modified his view of Alixe and her profession, although he was still unforgiving after the last incident. He recollected many occasions when really she had hinted at the truth; only he had been so desperately and unhappily convinced that it was otherwise, that he had not taken her words right. But it was not until he had eventually left the hospital, and ignoring the many suggestions that he should go straight home to Longmead, had been moved to Lennox's most comfortable flat five minutes from Piccadilly, that he asked himself what he was going to do next.

Lennox had heard nothing more of Alixe than had he for twelve months now, and although he knew her address, he did not give it to Dennis, and the latter did not ask for it. Under the circumstances, he realized that nothing could be done before the War ended, as everyone hoped it would this year; and he must therefore wait and see what the following days could give him.

He was also (for Dennis had to readjust his life and ideas altogether now) a disabled soldier with only one arm. He could certainly return to the firm of Eden and Armitage, and he had plenty of money and need not worry about a living; but, nevertheless, he could not easily ask any woman to marry him, nor would many wish to.

He would not be able to drive his car again as he used to; though in time, when he had an artificial limb, he might, if he could obtain a license. He would not be able to play golf, and it would take a long time to learn tennis, and dance again. And he could not look for Alixe until he was no longer a "crock," and able to carry on like other men. And even then Alixe was not like any other woman.

CHAPTER FOUR

DENNIS remained at Lennox's flat for some weeks, having persuaded Dr. Weston to tell Mrs. Armitage that he would be better left alone with another man than at home with his womenfolk; and he certainly benefited by the visit.

Lennox was still on the staff and had his car, and they took many long runs across the country in the keen autumn air—sometimes for hours without scarcely a word spoken between them, for neither were great talkers these days. Both had been "through it," and learned a good deal more from the War, and their service, than the Army had taught them; and both, seemingly, were waiting for the end.

They were still together when it came on 11th November, 1918.

Dennis's final impression and recollection of the War was the contrast between the previous Saturday night when they had been driving in the West End, with the closed and shuttered shop windows, darkened streets, and dimly-lighted vehicles—the silence and deadness after ten o'clock, the blackness and sense of unreality which never really left him—to the following Armistice night when every place was brilliantly lighted up, the streets packed, and everybody apparently gone mad.

Yet even that night there were ghosts in the crowd, of those who could not come back to take part in the celebration. Even that was unreal, and left him wondering what had happened to the world, and why.

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Lennox was sent out of London almost immediately

after that, and then Dennis had no alternative but to go home to Longmead.

He had taken his new decoration for "gallantry in the field" as a very undeserved honor; but his mother, Phyllis, and Cicely made a great fuss about it, and he found himself a hero, greatly to his embarrassment—that is to say, a hero outside Longmead House; but within, to Mrs. Armitage, still a boy.

"There was no need for you to go and stay with strangers when you left the hospital," she told him. "We could have looked after you at home quite well, and made you comfortable."

"I was recommended to stay in Town, or go to the sea," apologized Dennis. "The Thames valley is damp; and after the East, they said I should have to be careful this winter."

"Well then, we could have taken you to the South Coast," reproached his mother. "Cicely would have come, too—wouldn't you, dear?"

"With pleasure," answered Cicely, "but I am afraid Dennis did not want us, and would rather be with his own friends—wouldn't you, Dennis?"

"Yes, at present, frankly I would," he said. "I am nervy, and bad company for anybody. Lennox is a man, and understands exactly how I feel. He has been through it himself, you see."

"I don't see how a stranger can possibly understand as your own people would." Mrs. Armitage was still grieved. "But if you are satisfied that it did you more good, that is all there is to say about it."

And even then she began to drop hints about Cicely again, until Dennis was almost driven to return to Town to escape them.

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Christmas came and went; and a few weeks later, Mrs. Armitage died.

An attack of the then so prevalent influenza turned to pneumonia, and from the first there was no chance of saving her. The long worry of the War (which nobody had guessed she felt), of her only son being at the front, and Jean's untimely and tragic death, had preyed upon her mind and made her prematurely old; and the winter had been cold and wet. The doctor said that had she been able to get out of England to the South and sunshine, it might not have happened; but that at this time was impossible.

Cicely stayed at Longmead all that winter; for now her mother was back at Elverstrand, she was more needed here than there. Phyllis was with her padre husband in Cologne, and could not, so she said, come back; and there was no one else to look after the house and Dennis when Mrs. Armitage fell ill.

Dennis was not yet well enough to shoulder worries. He attended to business matters, but was glad to leave the house and the nursing to Cicely, who took charge of everything—even of Dennis himself.

The servants came to her for orders, the nurses deferred and the doctor talked to her—in fact, Miss Harding was looked upon by everybody in the house as the future mistress.

The night before she died, also, his mother sent for Dennis and told him that it was her last wish he should marry Cicely, who had been like a daughter to her for so many years.

"What should I have done without her! You left me—yes, I know you would have had to go in any case, but you wanted to, and went before you need. Jean deceived me, and her death left me still more alone; and now Phyllis has gone and does not care any longer. Only Cicely has remained—more to me than my own children. I should like her to be mistress here, Dennis, when I am gone."

But the kindly nurse intervened before he could promise, and sent him away.

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Cicely stayed until the funeral was over, and everything at Longmead had settled into ancient gloom. Her father had been there, too, for a couple of weeks, but he had returned to Norfolk; and then she came to Dennis and told him that she, too, must go.

"Why?" he exclaimed, for he hated the thought of being left alone in this silent house with its terrible air of melancholy. It did not seem possible to him even yet, depressed and far from well as he was, that his mother could really be dead. She had ruled them so long—been such an autocrat and presence in the household—that, without her the place was but a shell.

"Why must you go?" he asked in consternation. "Whatever shall I do in this old house without you? Why —you belong to it now, Cicely, more than I do; for you always liked, and I hate it. No—don't go yet!"

"My dear Dennis—I must." She shook her head and smiled. "You forget that you are a bachelor, and live alone now, so it would not be quite the right thing for me to stay here—people might talk unkindly of us. And really, too, there is nothing more for me to do now. You spoke of closing the house. I should, if I were you."

He nodded. "Yes—I will, but I must go through all the Mater's papers first. I haven't felt up to that job yet, but it has to be done, and then I must get back to Town and see the Medical Board again."

"Yes—of course you must!" declared Cicely. "I should go the same day that I do, if I were you, Dennis—I don't like leaving you here alone. Are you sure that you will be all right in London? Where will you stay? You gave up your flat when you entered the Army, didn't you? And you want taking care of, you know, Dennis."

He laughed rather wretchedly, for he was depressed and

lonely. There was no one left now but Cicely—he did not know where Alixe was, and his sister was married and gone. Nobody seemed to want him any more, now that he was disabled and out of the Army. Jack Eden was dead, and he did not even know where Lennox was.

"I wish you would stay and take care of me, Cicely," he said, reaching for her hand (such large, strong, capable hands they were); "you are so good, and so comfortable! I don't know what we should have done without you all this time since Jean died, and Phyllis married. I think——"

But what he thought was never put into words, for just at that moment there was a knock at the door, and the ancient housemaid, nearly as old as her late mistress, entered the room with a telegram for "Master Dennis," as he still was to her.

It was from Lennox in answer to a letter which Dennis had written him:

"Expect you to stay with me," he telegraphed. "Wire when you will arrive."

Dennis saw the comfortable bachelor flat, and the indispensable manservant, Wilson; he saw the Piccadilly Club and some of his friends—only a few, for many had not come home, and the life and gaiety which he had known before the War was represented very differently and inadequately, for perhaps 1919 was one of the hardest years London knew.

The War was over, but in some respects the aftermath was as bad; for the shortage of food, fuel, and labor still continued unremittingly, as the Army could only be slowly demobilized.

But that—London—anything—would be better than Longmead; better than (he grew hot and hated himself) than life with Cicely who was so good and so comfortable. The thought of Lennox, always entertaining though he had been through so much, drew him irresistibly, and

he thanked his lucky stars that the words he had been about to say had been stopped short.

He rose with a smile. "Oh—from Major Lennox," he said to Cicely. "He wants me to go back and stay with him at his flat when I go before the Medical Board. I wrote and told him I should be in Town again soon. Good! He's such a decent chap. I wish you knew him."

Cicely did not answer, but she smothered just one more sigh.

"So you won't need me after all," she said. "I really didn't think you would. But if you come back here, Dennis, later on, and you want me—I'll come again."

Dennis felt inclined to remind her that he would still be a bachelor, and she a spinster, and people might still "talk unkindly" about them. But he did not speak his thoughts—he was suddenly cheered up, and longed to get away.

"I never want to come here again," he told her. "I always hated the place, and I think I'll sell it."

"Oh, Dennis! Your home! Aunt Augusta loved it, and so do I!"

"Would you like to live here then?" he demanded, "with this ghastly old-fashioned furniture, and these ugly maidservants!"

Cicely could have answered truthfully that she would like to live anywhere with him; but she did not, and a few days later she left for Norfolk, bidding him good-by with tears in her eyes; for she realized now that though she might wait for ever for Dennis, he would never come to her and ask her to marry him.

. . . . .

He told Lennox about his "narrow escape" one night as they sat in his luxurious flat, smoking and reminiscing of the War, and the pre-War London they had known.

"Quite a lucky escape, and a near one," said Lennox; "you were wiser than you know. Never marry for any

reason but one, unless you can't help it; for it's better, though it may not be moral, to live with a woman you care for without marriage, than be respectably married without love. That's not sloppy sentiment—it's common sense. Quarreling, wretched couples, whether married or not, with uncomfortable homes, and children who have no respect for their parents, do not make good citizens."

"I don't think Cicely would have quarreled," said Dennis, dubiously, "we have always got along excellently—and she is a splendid manager, and could run six homes as well as most women run one. She is older than I."

"Worse and worse!" declared Lennox. "To marry a woman your own age is bad; but if she is older, then Heaven help you both! It may be all right while you are young, but what of the day when you are, say, forty-five, and in your prime, and she is getting on for fifty, and a—well, women don't grow old these days; they merely pass their girlhood! But it's all the same. No, my boy—wait until you meet pretty Miss Gerard again, and see if, now the War is over, you find her different."

"Even then it would be hard to forget," answered Dennis, his eyes and thoughts far away. "We shall pretend we do, of course; we shall say: 'The jolly old War is over, let's forget about it and be friends,' but I don't think we shall mean it in our hearts. Life is, and will be, so changed, that people will talk about 'before the War' as if it were another age."

"Perhaps," agreed Lennox; and then: "Anyhow, it is over," he added, "and there can be no harm in it now. Shall I give you the address to which I drove Miss Gerard in Suffolk?"

"I should be glad to have it," replied Dennis, "but I don't think I could write, or go and see her without an invitation—not under the circumstances. I was nothing to her, you see."

Lennox raised his eyes to Heaven as represented by the

sitting-room ceiling. He was never a patient, nor a humble man himself, and understood little of these virtues.

"Bit of a fool, aren't you? And not half a prig! The Army ought to have knocked all that out of you; but I suppose you can't help it. If she were my girl I should be on her door-step tomorrow—no, I should have been there long ago—and if she wasn't to be found at home, I should drive around England, or Europe if it were necessary, until I found her!"

"Probably!" retorted Dennis. "But you know perfectly well that in your case she wouldn't run away—indeed, she would very likely open the door herself and throw her arms round your neck! No—you can't exactly compare us."

"Well—come along, and we'll drive down to this place on Sunday and see if she is there," suggested Lennox. "Then we can prove the matter. I've been there, and know where it is; and if she is not at home, no doubt we can find out exactly where to find her. What about it?"

But Dennis shook his head.

"I don't think so, thanks," he answered.

CHAPTER FIVE

YET, because fate is stronger than mortal will—but a week or two had elapsed before Dennis Armitage came face to face with Alixe Gerard.

It was at the Café Napoleon where he and Lennox were lunching at a table reserved for the latter, and it was Lennox who suddenly called his attention to a girl in a gray squirrel fur coat, who was sitting across the huge room.

"If I'm not very much mistaken," began Lennox. "And that is General Gerard with her."

"What an odd coincidence," said Dennis—suddenly, for no reason whatever, wishing that it had not happened. "Yes—it is Alixe. I—would you—shall I—what do you think? Might I claim acquaintance?"

"You're a fool if you don't," answered the older man, "or, if you like, I will go up and speak to General Gerard. He won't remember me, of course—it doesn't matter who I say I am, or where I served under him—but he's bound to be polite. But why not go and speak to her yourself?"

"She may not wish to meet me again," stiffly. "I don't suppose, come to think of it, that I'm a pleasant memory; and she may want to forget all that horrible business on the East Coast. I should, if I were her."

Lennox, however, thought otherwise. He got up from the table, and walking across to the other dragged the unwilling Dennis after him.

General Gerard did not remember him until the incident was recalled, but obviously his daughter did.

"Yes, of course—you were at Mundesley, weren't you,"

she said, "with the Intelligence Department. I remember you well. And," her eyes passed him, "why—it's Dennis!"

Dennis bowed, and they looked at one another across a two years' gulf.

"Yes—Dennis Armitage. You have not forgotten me then?"

"Oh, no—of course not." She held out her hand; but it was cold and limp, and she barely smiled.

"You don't know my father, do you? Daddy—this is Captain Armitage—I have spoken of him to you, you know. And, yes—he has lost an arm!"

Lennox began to talk to cover up a confused moment. The Gerards were not alone, but lunching with another man; and now they insisted that Lennox and Dennis join them for coffee.

"You haven't changed much," remarked Dennis awkwardly, as he took the offered chair. "Lennox saw and recognized you at once."

"Yes—but I have changed. Tell me about yourself, how and when you lost your arm. I saw your name and portrait in the papers when you won the D.S.O. I told my father about you. Where have you been all this time, since you returned to England?"

Dennis told her as they drank their coffee—how he had been taken to Clareville House, and Lennox had chanced to find him there. And:

"He told me about you," he added.

"I thought somebody must have done so," she answered, "and, of course, Major Lennox knew quite a lot."

"If I had known your address, I would have written to you," said Dennis, entirely forgetting that he had been offered it more than once, and refused point-blank to go and see her. "But I didn't know whether you would care to hear from me or not."

"Why ever not? Of course I'm pleased; there is so much to say. But not here," with a smile. "Can't you come and see us one day?"

"I'd like to immensely; but aren't you staying in Town?"

"No—we only came up for the day, and are returning to Suffolk this afternoon. But it isn't very far."

Lennox was watching them with sidelong glances, and at the same time keeping up the conversation with General Gerard.

"Can't you spare me an hour? I've such a lot to say."

"I have some shopping to do, and our train goes at 3:30 from Liverpool Street."

"And I have some business to transact before that," interrupted her father, hearing this remark, "so I must really get along and meet you at the station, Alixe."

He rose to his feet, and looked half-hesitatingly at the two officers. "Perhaps you will run down one day in your car, Major Lennox, and see us, with Captain Armitage. You would like Captain Armitage to come, wouldn't you, Alixe?"

"Why yes—of course." Alixe was standing up now, too, and pulling on her gloves, but she did not look at Dennis as she spoke. "You'd like to come?" she asked him. "And now, if you are not busy, would you care to walk with me as far as Bond Street? Or have you your car here, as you always used to?"

"No—I haven't mastered driving through London traffic with one hand yet," answered Dennis, "although I'm getting on, and can manage in the country all right. Yes—I'll walk along with you with pleasure, if Lennox will excuse me."

They parted from Lennox and General Gerard at the entrance to the restaurant, just as if they had all been ordinary acquaintances who had re-met unexpectedly after the War; and Dennis and Alixe began to walk along Piccadilly towards Bond Street.

"I never remember seeing you at the Café Napoleon before," remarked Dennis, rather for the sake of something to say. "You did not use to go there, did you?"

"Not in my dancing days—no; it was too expensive. And besides, the 'Karina' was our rendezvous. I'm glad we met you today, and that you have seen my father. I had no idea where you were, or I think I should have written to you, Dennis, when the Armistice came, and asked you to come and see me. I have often wanted to explain to you—justify myself, if such a thing were possible, in your eyes—but it seems that Major Lennox has already told you."

"Yes—when I was in hospital last summer," answered Dennis. "You see, I believed you were dead; and frankly, I rather hoped you were, under what I then thought were the circumstances. But from the time I heard the truth, I began to get better, because I wanted so much to find you again, and hear from your own lips that it was true, and that you were not what you seemed and tried to make me believe you were."

"Dear Dennis!" She smiled at him. "That was nice of you, but we can't talk about it here, in the middle of Piccadilly, can we? So, won't you come down next Sunday, and spend the day with us? My father asked you, and I—I should like you to; and then I'll tell you everything."

"I will." Dennis did not hesitate. "I'll drive down early, so that we shall have a long time together—I won't even bring Lennox. I have a chauffeur now, so I'll come along alone, if I may."

They shook hands at the corner of Bond Street. The same couple—she was the same Alixe, and had still the same appealing charm for him—but there was a shadow between them now. The War—Blecton Park—and Carl von Wehlen.

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Dennis drove to Suffolk the following Sunday morning, eluding Lennox without any difficulty, because the latter had half a dozen engagements; and: "What do you take

me for?" he murmured, when told of the invitation. "This is your show—not mine."

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And now luncheon was over, and he and Alixe walked in the old-world garden.

It was the first week in April, and daffodils carpeted the ground beneath the trees like gold—primroses showed yellow in the hedgerows, and already the first tulips were blooming in the flower-beds near the house, where the last of the hyacinths still lingered.

"How very different to Blecton Park," remarked Dennis. "It was a dark, gloomy, almost sinister spot, and I always hated it. Who has it now, do you know?"

"I don't. I expect Mr. Meyerling was deported when he was released," answered Alixe. "I've never been near the place since, nor do I ever wish to see it again. I hated it, and the part I played—I've wanted to tell you that, Dennis, and explain."

"Oh, but I quite understand."

"No, you don't. You have heard from Major Lennox that I was working for the British Government, and not the German; but you do not understand how it was that I could do it—lie as I had to—betray—and do everything apparently horrible—and I'd like you to know for my own justification."

"Of course, I quite understand that such things had to be done, and such parts played." Yet Dennis's voice was cold. "The one thing I cannot get over and understand is why you treated me as you did. You need not have drugged my champagne, Alixe—you might have given me a square chance, as a British officer, to fight. I'm no coward, you know, and I could have accounted for at least one or two of them."

"But you wouldn't have had a chance, Dennis!" She shook her head. "You don't perhaps realize even yet what a desperate corner you were in; but I knew, and you

see, even then, I had to put my country first, and dare not give myself away by helping you as I should like to have done. Carl von Wehlen meant to kill you, and he would have done so if I had not laughed, and told him that I would give you something to keep you quiet until we had got clean away. I said it would be much worse for you to be found actually in the house, drugged and insensible, than if you had been killed, fighting."

"But I would rather have fought, even if I had been killed," repeated Dennis.

"They were three to one, for there was a man watching us all the time we were in that room, before Carl came. The house was full of them, and they would not have hesitated."

"Yet you were safe, were you not?"

"Because they believed me to be one of themselves, and never really suspected me. But I had to sacrifice you, or they would have very quickly. Dennis—I'm sorry, but I couldn't help it. I liked you, and you were young, and it seemed to me that England would need you another day; so I could not let you die in a corner, by treachery, like that. Too—I should have felt responsible; and had I given any sort of alarm, they would have killed us both and got away, for the house was pretty well impregnable for at least half an hour. The windows were all shuttered and barred; and although they did not know the passage as I did, yet I have no doubt they would have made their escape."

Dennis nodded, and tried to be convinced. But:

"It was a rotten job for a woman—for a girl like you," he said. "However they could let you do it, I don't know."

"Nobody made me—I did it of my own free will. You see," she hesitated, "I was brought up in a family, and a hot-bed of secret agents and spies, and I learned and knew their methods. They trained me for it—especially Carl—" she faltered a little—"and he meant me to help

him here because I spoke English as no German could, and also because I was related to an Army family; and so, as he thought, I should have the *entrée* to many places, and the ear of many important people if I took my part as my father's daughter. He wished me to dance, because it was necessary for me to be in London from time to time to meet the others, and receive my instructions. The Karina Hotel was our headquarters, and my dancing was camouflage."

"But why say 'our' and not 'their'?"

"I was working with them, you see. But when I went to my father's house, for the first time——" Alixe clasped her hands together, and began to tell him of that day when Otto Wertheim had driven her down to the Suffolk village, and she had surprised a children's party—told him of her meeting with—with her father——

"Oh, Dennis—he was so nice to me! They both were, and I hated myself for what they had brought me over to do, and to be. I also hated my mother for what she had told me about him, and I was in despair. They begged me to live with them—to be their daughter. And then I forget what I said. It was at night, and my father and I were talking in his library, and he asked me straight out if the Helms had sent me over to get information. You see—we knew there was a danger of war, as well as the Germans. We didn't say much—the public didn't know anything—but my father was in touch with the Intelligence Department, and was on the alert.

"And—well, he was and is my father; and he explained to me that I was by birth and parentage a British subject, so that I could not possibly work against my country. He laughed about the 'Fatherland,' and my oath to the Germans.

" 'But *this* is your fatherland,' he told me, 'and King George is your King and Emperor. By all means serve God and the King—but see that it is the right King. There have to be secret agents and spies in every country,

and women are incalculably useful; but there is not, and there never was, any use on earth for a traitor!'

"But, of course, they would not have let me go like that, and we knew it, for in Germany there is a complete list of everyone who 'serves' their country in this way. They are all over the world, and of all nationalities, but their names, descriptions, their peculiarities, and the particular methods they use, are all down on the list, and they are followed and watched, as it were spied upon, by the master spies; and I knew perfectly well that Carl von Wehlen, who was the head of that particular band, would watch and track me down. Otto Wertheim was in charge, and gave me my instructions; and as you know, he never left me for long. So I remained just where I was, only—the information I gave was my own version, and there was a lot more that I gave to my father, and others in this country. It wasn't nice, for I was playing a double game, and they were my friends and trusted me; and it wasn't easy, for I knew perfectly well that if I were so much as suspected, I should be removed, and possibly sent back to Germany. That was one reason why I wore that gold armlet with the number on it, so that, if it was absolutely necessary, I could call upon the British to help me."

"You must have hated it," said Dennis, for he hated it himself. "And I hope you did."

"Yes—and no," answered Alixe. "I hated the double game, especially with Carl—but I liked to feel I was helping my father, and my country, and I was quite good at it—I so loathed the Germans. Now I know that I always did from the time I was a child. I hated my uncles, with their cropped heads and bulgy eyes, and my cousin, who was a U-boat commander; and most of all, when I—when I thought about it, and what he had made me—I hated Carl von Wehlen.

"And when I realized, after I came to England and met my father, how I had been lied to and fooled, and what

they meant me to do—no, I did not altogether hate it."

Dennis did not answer. They had come to a rustic seat beneath a cedar tree, where they seated themselves, and he sat and looked at the waving sea of daffodils, and remembered (as one does remember odd things at odd times) how he and Alixe had walked through the Green Park in London, one summer day, nearly five years ago —had sat down beneath a tree, and he had first asked her to marry him. Oh, how long ago—how unspeakably long it all seemed, and how much had come between!

He had wanted so much to meet her again—to know that she lived and had not changed—and he recollected almost with a shudder all those terrible months when he had believed her shot or imprisoned; and his unbounded relief when he learned the truth. And since then, had not his one desire in life been to see her, and to learn the truth from her own lips?

Well—now it had all come true, and here they were, together again. But now there was nothing to say, for still that sinister war shadow stood between, and over them—Carl von Wehlen!

He had hoped—yes, he knew it now—he had hoped that she had lied to him about that, as she had lied to him (however necessarily) about so many other things; but he knew that she had not; and even though the opportunity was here, he was afraid to grasp it and ask her.

"I suppose you are not married," he remarked idly. "Of course not—why should you be?"

"Married?" She looked surprised. "Oh, no—I shall not get married. But what about you?"

"No—I am not married either, nor am I likely to be."

"Poor old Cicely, still waiting?" She laughed faintly. "You ought to marry her, Dennis; really you ought."

Dennis told her in a few words of his mother's death, and how good Cicely had been.

"But I couldn't marry her—I simply couldn't," he

added. "And as for the beastly house which I never liked, I have sold it, lock, stock, and barrel. It seemed a shame to leave it standing there empty, when there is such a terrific demand for houses; and I never want to live in nor see it again. So now I am back in my old flat; I was fortunate to be able to get it."

"Not much of a home for you." Alixe shook her head. "You ought to have someone to look after you, Dennis; though I expect by this time you are quite accustomed to your arm—or, rather, the lack of it."

"No—one does not get accustomed to it." He laughed a little. "And I find it lonely, too. But I'm going to South Africa at the end of the summer, to visit a man I served with who has gone out to Rhodesia to settle. I don't think I could stick the winter alone in England, when I am demobilized; and I expect even Lennox will be gone, for he talks of East Africa. So I think I, too, will migrate."

"Alone! But are you well enough, and independent enough to go alone?"

"I have an excellent manservant who was also through the War. You see, I still find it awkward to dress myself, tie my ties, and my shoes. But I have nothing to complain of, for I came back comparatively whole."

"With two medals for gallantry, and a few more for service," finished Alixe softly. "My knight did well—if you are still my 'Perfect Knight'."

"Still and always," said Dennis. "But—I shall always wish you had let me strike a blow for England. It seems to me—" he hesitated. "You did not mean it so, I am sure; but you had us both there—von Wehlen and myself—and you let him win. You did not even give me a chance."

"I did my best for you." Unconsciously Alixe's voice was a little cold—for can a woman ever forget? And once, however long ago it was, she had loved Carl von Wehlen. "I had to do what I did—it was my duty, as

yours was as a soldier. There is, too, just one other thing I would like to say in my own defense—about Carl——"

"Oh, please—I don't want to hear," he interrupted.

"You must hear this," said Alixe firmly. "I did not know that Carl was in England, that night at Blecton Park. I always hoped and prayed that I might not be called upon by my duty to betray him—for that, I think, is an unspeakable crime. So they did not tell me that he was coming that night—I, too, was betrayed! It was through my agency that Carl met his death; but I could not help myself—it was too late. You heard what happened to him, I suppose?"

"Yes—that was the end?"

"Oh yes; they sank the submarine, and then—and then I was free. But it was my last job—I would not go on after that; I couldn't; and my father let me come home and live here quietly. I'd like you to know that I was not altogether vile."

"I don't see how, in your position, you could help yourself," said Dennis; and they walked on without further conversation, until they came to the boundary wall. It looked down a long meadow to the village green, half a mile away.

"Was it true what you told me that night about you and von Wehlen?" asked Dennis suddenly.

"Yes—it was true."

"You loved him? Of course—you must have done."

"Yes—I loved him when I was a young girl. He had always been my hero, you see. But when I really knew him, and understood what he wanted me to do, and be, after I came to England—I don't know. I feared him, and he had an almost hypnotic influence over me; but love—who can say?"

"Still—" Dennis paused, "I think you did; and most certainly you never loved me. But I always cared for you, as you know—will you marry me now, Alixe? The

War is over, and we have nothing to stand between us now. Von Wehlen is dead—so is my mother. You have more than proved yourself British, and I—I've not failed either you or my country, have I? It is true I am disabled, but——"

"Dennis! Dennis!" She shook her head to stop him. "You, too, have proved yourself. Never think that would matter to me, but—I do not feel as if I could ever marry. I feel old—oh, so old, and as if I have been through so much. I don't think I could begin again."

"I would try my best to make you happy," said Dennis. "And you like me, don't you?"

"Yes, I like you very much, and I appreciate the honor you do me, asking me again to be your wife now you know all my story, even about Carl. But not yet, Dennis—I couldn't."

"Some day, then—some day. Alixe, will you?"

"Go to Africa as you have arranged." She smiled at him. "And come and see me again when you return home. And then—perhaps then—I shall have learned to forget. Look, Dennis!"—she touched his arm and pointed to the distant green—"they are putting up a war memorial to the men of our village who fell. They are building them everywhere, all over the country, so that we shall never forget; and this one—it is to be a plain stone with a drawn sword beneath the cross—I shall always be able to see when I walk this way. Yet they tell us to forget!"

"That we shall never do," answered Dennis. "The next generation, perhaps, but not ours. It wasn't only the War—it was everything: the results, and the changes. How many families are there, I wonder, like mine, come to an end, broken up! My mother and Jean are dead; Phyllis is abroad. The home is sold, and I am all that is left."

He stood, staring over the bare meadow, as if already

he could see the finished memorial; and into his mind came the immortal words, so that he repeated them aloud:

"They shall not grow old as we who are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn——"

They would go on, for ever young in the minds and hearts of those who were left, still smiling—a deathless army of brave men which would never be forgotten through the passing years.

. . . . .

He turned again to Alixe and took her within the circle of his arm. He kissed her; and she smiled, and said: "Dennis dear!" just as she used to say it.

"Some day," he murmured, "I'll come back in the spring, and try and teach you to forget."

THE END

Right good story.

L. E. Scott Setzler